

Childbearing in Japanese Society:  
Traditional Beliefs and Contemporary Practices

by  
Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Faculty of Social Sciences  
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## ***Abstract***

In recent years there has been an oft-held assumption as to the decline of traditions as well as folk belief amidst the technological modern age. The current thesis seeks to bring to light the various rituals, traditions and beliefs surrounding pregnancy in Japanese society, arguing that, although changed, they are still very much alive and a large part of the pregnancy experience. Current perception and ideas were gathered through a series of in depth interviews with 31 Japanese females of varying ages and socio-cultural backgrounds. These current perceptions were then compared to and contrasted with historical data of a folkloristic nature, seeking to highlight developments and seek out continuities. This was done within the theoretical framework of the liminal nature of that which is betwixt and between as set forth by Victor Turner, as well as theories set forth by Mary Douglas and her ideas of the polluting element of the liminal.

It quickly became obvious that the beliefs were still strong having though developed from a person-to-person communication and into a set of knowledge aquired by the mother largely from books, magazines and or offline.



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Japanese names are given in the usual Japanese order family name first, given name second. However, where a Japanese author publishes in a European language and his or her name appears on the title page with given name first that practice has been followed

## Chapter 1: Introduction

There exist few as taboo- and meaning-laden experiences as pregnancy and childbirth. Every society that the author has so far come across imbues this period with various folk beliefs, rituals and great cultural significance—a period that has also generally been marked as inherently dangerous, not only for the woman and child but also for society as a whole. For a set period the mother-to-be is of two worlds, experiencing an existential transition reflected by huge physiological changes as well as social ones. She is no longer just a girl, but not yet a mother: the foetus is not yet a child.

Childbearing, although frequently studied from several academic perspectives, is, however, seldom the main focus of research. Of late there has admittedly been an increase in folklore-based research in the field (e.g. Hulubaş, 2011); however, in general, folkloristics has not been diligent in such studies, and anthropological ethnographies often spare only few pages to the life-cycle rituals of societies studied. Hence it is generally within the schools of religious taboo and pollution, medical and obstetrics texts, history, as well as the recent focus on feminist issues, that the subject has been tackled.

This research aims to look at the rituals, beliefs and taboos that surround pregnancy and childbirth in Japanese society, as parts of a greater rite of passage, as the young woman passes from one status within society to another. It is the individual's transition between statuses expressed in a ritualized manner. The period of transition begins when she finds out she is pregnant, and is not completed until she and the child have been ritually fully re-integrated into society.

There is an often expressed assumption that with the increase in scientific knowledge and education there is an automatic decline in ritual and belief, as well as a decline in the role of religion, seeing that urbanization and industrialization tend to invoke substantive changes in social systems. Japanese society, having so dramatically traversed from an agricultural society in the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the current modern, urbanized, technologically advanced society, makes for prime research ground in this regard.

It is the contention of this thesis that no matter how urbanized a society becomes, traditional ideas have a tendency to reappear, although changed and adapted to modernity, and often in a 'modern scientific' guise, implying that they do indeed serve a societal purpose. As Bremen puts it, 'As rites disappear, in rural as well as urban areas, others are seen to take their place.' (Bremen, 1995: 1). It is of great folkloric interest to see which customs have prevailed, which have more-or-less died out, and what new rituals may have appeared, in particular those concerning pregnancy, as they can be informative as to changes to societal ideas about the ritual liminality of pregnant women, as well as ritual liminality of the unborn child.

People are individuals and approach rites from different backgrounds and ideologies. Rituals exist in society and serve the function of assisting with moving from one defined group or one position within a group to another although they may in some cases be perceived as a perfunctory act, with a religious meaning of minimal importance for the participants. Nevertheless, if they are still being practised there must perforce be a reason, they implicitly must serve some societal as well as personal purpose. The famed Japanese folklorist Yanagita argued that the unconscious deed revealed the belief, that the act of following a ritual custom, such as offering tobacco to a deceased relative, even if perceived as a custom, also proved belief in the souls of the dead (Yamashita, 1985: 60). Thus rather than doctrine, the current focus will be on practice, on the behavioural patterns along with social and cultural influences rather than professed beliefs.

Life-cycle rituals are a device assisting the individual in making the adjustments to a major life change, the need for which has not lessened in modern society, but it is the societal function they serve that is of major significance for the purpose of this thesis. Although many of the older beliefs, taboos and rituals surrounding childbirth in Japan have now been all but forgotten, I would argue that rituals still exist, albeit many having changed form, and are perhaps not as obvious as they were in earlier times. Traditions change and develop their popularity or necessity influenced by changes in society. An example is that of the Day of the

Dog, *inu no hi* [戌の日], a well advertised tradition based on the lunar calendar, with both Buddhist traditional and Shinto elements, where in the fifth month of pregnancy the pregnant woman will wrap a maternity sash, *hara obi* [腹帯] around her midsection, often accompanied by a visit to the local shrine (Hardacre, 1997: 23; Lebra, 1984: 171). Although not a new tradition *per se*, its current popularity has caused it to be branded a concocted ‘necessity’, although Lebra has argued that the fact that it proves so popular must in some way reflect the need for a ritual at that point, the social acknowledgement of pregnancy (Lebra, 1984: 171).

Some new customs arise, seemingly by design, an example being the funeral service for foetuses, *mizuko kuyō* [水子供養], which has been heavily criticised for abusing parental sorrow for the temple's monetary gain, an issue which will be discussed later (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 305; Harrison, 1999: 770). Conversely, it has also been argued by Elizabeth Harrison that a ritual does not gain hold unless it serves a function, i.e. unless there is a need that it thereby satisfies. She speaks of the necessity of, if not these rituals, then personalized rituals to ‘move on’ —move past the abortion (Harrison, 1999: 792). In his first work of a folkloric nature, *Tōno Monogatari*, Yanagita recounts the story of a woman’s near-death experience wherein she encounters a wall of babies preventing her from passing on, indicating the active belief at the time that the spirits of children wait in limbo for the chance to be born (Hardacre, 1997: 210; Yanagita, 1936: 155). Ideas of death and blood pollution are seminal to the Shinto world view; they entwine with the pregnancy and birth, making it necessary to examine also the thought behind pollution in order to comprehend the taboos surrounding pregnancy and birth.

This present research works mainly on the basis of Arnold van Gennep’s (1873–1957) basic theories of rites of passage, making use of Victor Turner’s focus on the liminal period, the ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner, 1969: 95). Mary Douglas’ (1921–2007) approach to pollution and taboos is further examined in the chapters on pollution and *mizuko kuyō*.

Within Japanese society there is considerable pressure upon the mother-to-be, as

responsibility for the foetus lies in the mother's hands as shall be further explored in the pregnancy chapter. Pregnancy books abound, nearly all replete with cutesy images of the happy mother.

Handbooks on maternity folklore or life cycle folklore focus on the historical background, that which was, or tend to give items of folk belief without explaining derivation or relevance. They at times give generalized answers as to what the current ways of celebrating entail, while very few draw out the variety present nor the attitude presented by the women themselves towards these beliefs and traditions. Thus this current research seeks to draw out and present traditional perceptions and data collected by folklorists, anthropologists and religious researchers through the ages, and contrast—or rather compare—it with current perceptions and attitudes.

The dissertation challenges the idea often presented that rituals and beliefs have all but died out as society has become modernised as well as the frequently presented idea of late that when a tradition is upheld it is largely through pecuniary involvement on the part of Shrines and Temples. A contradiction arises within the theoretical question posed: are women then active agents, choosing to perform rituals and follow traditional wisdom, or is the state of liminality being imposed upon them, and then in what manner?

- To what degree is the status of pregnancy in contemporary Japanese culture a liminal period, and how do the liminal elements present themselves.
- By looking at the older traditions as well as the religious and magico-religious ideas behind them, the intent is to study modern day perceptions of pregnancy and what rituals and beliefs surround this life changing event in the Japan of today

The purpose of this dissertation is offer an insight into the pregnancy and birthing period in Japanese society, as well as to offer an overview of the current folk beliefs and traditions, alongside a historical comparison.



## **1.1 Theoretical perspective**

The current thesis builds upon theoretical approaches developed through the school of folklore studies, as varied as that has been, as well as drawing deeply from both anthropological studies as well as feminist studies.

### **1.1.1 Folkloristics**

In researching both the theoretical background and previous research on the subject, it became obvious that, although independent, the social sciences all intertwine in one way or another, and that folklore, as Alan Dundes so aptly puts it, straddles the humanities as well as the social sciences (Dundes, 1992: vii). Hence, within this literature review, a number of the schools within the humanities and social sciences are represented: folklore, anthropology, religious studies, sociology, history and demography, to name but a few.

When W.J. Thoms coined the term ‘Folklore’, in his influential letter to the Athenaeum in 1846, he made it apparent that he was seeking to save remnants of the soon-to-be-extinct sort, as he phrased it himself: ‘recollection of a now-neglected custom – some fading legend, local tradition, or fragmentary ballad!’ (Thoms, 1846: 862). The Romantic Movement and the emphasis on nationalism had led to the famous collecting of fairy tales and the emphasis on the *Volk*, the peasant. Long has this been the general approach to folklore studies: studying the quaint, the archaic, and something very much belonging to “the other”. The “other” in this case being the peasant, the illiterate. This ethnocentric bias was brought on in the nineteenth century under the influence of Darwinism and the comparative method in folkloric studies – a method aptly described by Andrew Lang when he said ‘There is a form of study, Folklore, which collects and compares the similar but immaterial relics of old races, the surviving superstitions and stories, the ideas which are in our time but not of it’ (Lang, 1884: 11).

There have been four major schools of thought in the history of folklore studies, from which folklorists today are trying to distance themselves: antiquarian thought described folklore as quaint; comparative mythologists thought the customs were relics of ancient myths; Lang and the evolutionists claimed these were survivals from a primitive past; and Frazer considered pagan fertility cults to be the basis of all customs.

The school of folkloric and anthropological approach to religion is said to owe its first steps to scholars Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) and James George Frazer (1854–1941). Subsequently, the schools diverged, with the school of anthropology focusing on in-depth ethnographic studies of individual cultures, whilst finding fault with the comparative method of folkloristics, and the folklorists doing fieldwork closer to home (Dundes, 1992: 60). However, whereas the earlier scholars had worked mainly from letters, books and data collected by others, and hence were dubbed “armchair scholars”, in the twentieth century the emphasis moved from the armchair towards actual field research. Nevertheless, the folkloric school of thought has retained a strong hold on the comparative method, exemplified in Dundes’ argument that it is always an ‘error’ to analyse a folkloric item as if it were unique to a given cultural context (Dundes, 1992: 63). Still, an obvious point of contention between the schools of folklore and of anthropology, as the anthropologist Takao Sofue discusses, is in the Japanese folklorists’ emphasis upon ‘gathering data of unusual manners and customs’ and thereby neglecting systematic research and analysis of Japanese culture as a whole (Sofue, 1960: 312). Van Gennep found fault with this tendency to place the emphasis on one area of society as an approach, claiming that rather than look at the dynamics of a rite they tended to focus on external similarities (van Gennep, 1960: 10).

However, that is precisely the difference between the folkloristic approach and the anthropological. Folklorists study items of folklore, certainly in a given cultural context of course, but the emphasis will be on beliefs, traditions and those intangible items of knowledge that are shared by a group of people. Hence, although in many ways studying the same materials as the cultural anthropologist, sociologist, historian or ethnologist, it is that difference in focus that defines the study of folklore.

Another point that deserves mention is that ‘folklore’ as a technical term has through history been open to different interpretations and encompasses different fields, with emphases dependent on the school as well as country of origin. Even within Japanese academia there is some confusion, and the connotations of the term *minzokugaku*, inasmuch as the Japanese

term for folklore, *minzokugaku* [民俗学] is homophonic with the Japanese term for ethnology [民族学] with only the ideographs conveying the difference in meaning.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.2 Japanese School of folklore

The development of folklore studies in Japan is a well documented phenomenon (Naoe, 1949; Yanagita, 1944; Makino, 2004; Takanori, 2003; Mori, 1980) and quite often synonymous with Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), often dubbed the father of folklore research in Japan.

During his career, Yanagita was remarkably prolific. His accumulated works were published by Chikuma Shobō in the ‘Standard Collection of the Works of Yanagita Kunio’ *Teihon Yanagita Kunioshū* and comprises 31 volumes and five appendix volumes. The popularity of his work is such that one scholar noted that they ‘do, in fact, take up copious amount of room on ones’ shelves’ (Yoneyama, 1985: 30). Sheer volume aside, is generally acknowledged that Yanagita ‘established methods and framework for folklore studies in Japan’ (Makino, 2004: 133; Yoneyama, 1985). He directed the Rural Life Research Institute from 1935, which two years later came to be called The Institute of Japanese Folklore (Naoe, 1949: 278). The Yanagita school of folklore has not been without its critics, the major controversy arising over perceived nationalism. However, Yoneyama has argued that Yanagita sought to preserve the national culture that was in danger of being overwhelmed by the state nationalism (Yoneyama, 1985), and Koschmann (1993: 146) has demonstrated that although very conservative and never contesting the emperor system formally, he did take part in a movement opposing the shrine consolidation programme initiated in 1906.

Yanagita was active in the midst of great world turmoil. Having originally majored in agricultural administration, he later took up a post at the Asahi newspaper, which allowed him further freedom to travel around Japan just before the Japanese period termed the ‘Fifteen-

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<sup>1</sup> The journal for Japanese folklore studies is hence called *Nihon Minzokugaku* [日本民俗学] “Japanese Folklore” *Bulletin of The Folklore Society of Japan*, whereas until 2004 the journal for Japanese ethnological studies was called *Minzokugaku Kenkyū* [民族学研究] “Japanese Journal of Ethnology”. It was then changed to *Bunkajinruigaku* [文化人類学] “The Japanese Journal of Cultural Anthropology”.

year War' began (Shimizu, Bremen and Kokoritsu, 2003: 1). As was the case in the USA, anthropologists benefited greatly from the Fifteen-year War (1931–1945), seeing as the wartime political and economic agents offered opportunities for anthropologists and ethnologists (Shimizu, Bremen and Kokoritsu, 2003: 1).

Mori Kōichi has done an in-depth study of Yanagita's political stance, as has Koschmann, and both reach the conclusion that Yanagita trod the fine line of neither speaking out against the government nor being openly supporting. As Ronald A. Morse has argued, 'Yanagita's mission was to revitalise the Japanese sensibility from the bottom up', with the focus always on the common man.

Morse notes that, in the 1960s folklore revival in Japan, 'Folklore, interpreted as an echo of the past and a vigorous voice of the present, spoke to the rising tide of nostalgia about the sources of Japan's past', speaking to Marxist yearnings of the common man (Morse, 1985: 12).

Yanagita's contention was that women, children and the elderly were the real carriers of folklore, that they carried 'traces of old customs and unconscious tradition' and that they had been minor, or marginal, elements in the social consciousness of Japan's modernization (translated in Yamashita, 1985: 62). With his research focus exemplifying this opinion, his books on the folk vocabulary of taboo, as well as the vocabulary of childhood and childbearing, will be cited frequently here. On March 23, 1938, Yanagita held an informal session subsequent to "The First Japan Folk-Ethnology Lecture Women's Discussion Group Meeting" which consequently led to the formation of the 'Women's Group' (*Onna no kai*), a folklore study group focused on the folklore of women, which met regularly at Yanagita's home and resulted in numerous publications (Tonomura, 2007: 38). Shinobu Origuchi (1887–1953), an almost equally significant name in the history of folklore research in Japan, whilst a contemporary of Yanagita, focused mainly on the folklore of men and elderly men, and hence is not of direct relevance to the current thesis. He, however, unlike Yanagita, whose focus became increasingly limited to the rice farmer society, embraced Japanese cultural diversity

within his research (Shimamura, 2003: 199). Although Noboru Miyata, former president of the Folklore Society, also followed the tradition of focusing on women and children, akin to Yanagita, the difference in emphasis being that whereas Yanagita kept his focus on the rice farmers (Shimamura, 2003: 197), Miyata focused more on urban folklore (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1997).

### **1.1.3 Rites of Passage**

The term 'Rite of Passage' was coined by Arnold van Gennep in his influential work of the same name. The theory dictates that our lives are made up of a succession of stages, the transitions between which are marked by ceremonies that delineate and clearly define each stage. In order to be fully incorporated within a group one must leave the former state completely behind; therefore the accompanying rituals very often incorporate a symbolic death and a subsequent symbolic rebirth as the new member of the group. 'A rite of passage is a set of symbol-laden actions by means of which one passes through a dangerous zone, negotiating it safely and memorably' (Grimes, 2000: 6). These successions of stages, transitions, he felt were implicit in man's life as it resembled nature in this regard 'The universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity' (van Gennep, 1960: 3). As society is in constant flux, a new condition demands rites to incorporate the individual into the new group. Through this idea, van Gennep explained general similarities between social movements within various societies, arguing that all societies have rites of passage as they experience major changes in an individual's life. The purpose of the rites were explained by Hori as 'The rites seek to resolve the anxiety accompanying predictable or unpredictable changes in individuals or in the interpersonal relationships in the community' (Hori, 1968: 25).

Van Gennep separated rites of passage into three principal stages:

- (1) Rites of separation, whereby the individual is removed from their group and separated from their previous social status;

- (2) Rites of transition, through a transitional period during which the individual belongs to neither group, and is temporarily outside of society; and
- (3) Rites of incorporation, where the individual is re-incorporated into society and accepts a new status.

The stages, he argued, can be of varying importance, dependent on the type of rite. Thus rites of separation are prominent at funerals, while rites of incorporation predominate at marriage ceremonies (van Gennep, 1960: 10). As Eliade points out, these rituals pertaining to the initiation ceremony have survived and exist in highly developed societies and higher religions, having been re-interpreted and transformed (Eliade, 1958), thus proving their relevance in modern society.

Van Gennep used a complicated classification system, dividing rites into groups according to their elements, many of which overlapped. Although clearly stating that a rite could fall under several categories simultaneously, a pregnant woman observing a food taboo would be performing a rite that would be at the same time dynamistic, contagious, direct and negative.

Turner in contrast focused on the rites of transition, the actual state of liminality, the 'betwixt and between'—the period wherein the individuals no longer form a part of the old, but are not yet part of the new. They are often removed from the main group, their clothing and possessions removed, and they are subjected to various ordeals. Turner (1974: 81), in describing the status of those in the limen, said 'Their behaviour is normally passive or humble' as if they are being 'ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew'. The breakdown of the initiate's previous belief system opens them psychologically to new learning, new symbolic messages. The grinding down also invokes a feeling of belonging to others in the same group 'Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism' (Turner, 1974: 81). The egalitarianism is expressed by the fact that all go through the great rites, whether they are wealthy or poor, and they all experience roughly the same.

This period is often laden with taboos and folk belief. The individuals are in danger from

the supernatural realm as they do not fit into a specific category. The limen is often described in physical terms, such as ‘no-man’s land’. The feeling is that, once passed, there can be no return, and a ritual transformation has taken place. Pregnancy and birth exemplify this journey. The woman before getting pregnant is of one status; upon becoming pregnant she is neither a girl nor a woman who has borne a child. The pregnancy is fraught with dangers and taboos, never having experienced it herself before she is bombarded with information from those who know better. She is told what to wear, what to avoid, what to eat or not—in effect, she is being trained. She develops a comradeship with other pregnant women, and, upon birth, should all go well, she has proven herself and will be reintegrated into society as a mother. During the liminal period, in particular just having given birth, the woman is often perceived as polluting. The idea of blood pollution in Japanese culture will be discussed in depth in chapter 1.2.5. but most societies have seen this period as pollutive. The churching of women is a prime example of the liminal nature of pregnancy and birthing. Anthropological ethnologies describe multitudes of societies wherein the woman is in isolation for at least some part of the process, and we need to look no further than the Bible for a reference closer to home. In Leviticus 12, verses 2–5, there are precise instructions prescribing the number of days a woman was to remain apart from the society, dependent, of course, on whether she had borne a male or a female child.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.

4. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.

5. But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days

*The Bible: King James Version, Leviticus 12. 2–5.*

## **1.2 Thesis overview**

As the research material follows a natural progression, from conception through to child bearing and rearing, it was decided to build the chapter structure upon these. The aim of the dissertation is to make a contribution as well as fill in a noticeable gap in current knowledge on folk beliefs and traditions pertaining to pregnancy in Japanese culture, through an interdisciplinary approach, seeking historical knowledge from treatises on folklore, anthropology, ethnology, sociology of religion, gender studies and history. Consequently an overview is presented of the research from which the historical and background data is derived.

Following the literature overview, chapter 2 explores and presents the methodology applied within the research. The material presented is largely the amalgamation of data collected through 31 in-depth interviews. The qualitative nature of the research yielded minimal statistical data, while focusing on general knowledge of various traditions, the respondents own practice thereof or their decision not to practice, as well as their perception towards these. An online questionnaire functioned largely as preliminary data from whence to draw out and to focus interview questions and directions. The scope of the thesis developed in a slightly different direction based on the results gathered from the questionnaire, leading the research focus at that early stage away from general traditional beliefs but rather towards ritual practices. The chapter explores qualitative methodological approach, as well as the narrative analysis principles adopted.

Chapter 3 introduces the Japanese socio-cultural environment so as to add to the readers understanding of the situational setting wherein Japanese women choose to bear children. As societal pressures are numerous and onerous, the need arises to further explain the multitude of stressors influencing the decision, as well as how the woman's social status changes with changing roles.

Japanese religious thought is somewhat unusual in particular in regards to the syncretism expressed wherein one religious thought or practice does not exclude another, and practice of



rituals far outweighs philosophical ponderings. This will be slightly illuminated in the chapter.

From that point on the thesis follows the progress of pregnancy. Thus Chapter 4 explores the various ways in which conception can be encouraged and gender determination practised. Shinto, being a nature-oriented set of beliefs, possesses a number of festivals celebrated on an annual or biannual basis which function to encourage the fertility of the land. The varying elements of these festivals are thought to encourage fertility of any number of types, such as fertility of the mind. However, the strongest link is that to human fertility and conception. Talismans and wish tablets are also examined, along with the socio-cultural pressures that became apparent through the interviews by means of gifting of talismans. Hot springs have been a stable element in Japanese culture since time immemorial, and seeing as each spring is believed to have a healing power of some sort, we look at the springs known for their fertility power, as well as the attitudes expressed towards them. Yet another element that emerged strongly through the interviews was the idea of influencing the gender of the child.

Chapter 5 follows the woman through the liminal period, throughout the pregnancy and the various taboos, restrictions as well as rituals, that exemplify this period. The binding of the maternity sash in the fifth month of pregnancy is a socially important event, and is examined closely in regards to the perceptions of the ritual, as well as the perceived change in being upon donning the sash. A traditional belief—laughed at by most yet tellingly also practised by most—is the necessity of cleaning the bathroom competently throughout the pregnancy, causing the child to be beautiful, smart or talented. That and the variety of other ways the mother's actions and experiences are perceived to be able to influence the child are discussed. Thus dietary restrictions and that which is perceived as mandatory will also be looked at, as well as the idea that being in a calamitous year affects the child, a belief in which women often expressed disbelief, yet were aware of.

In Chapter 6 the birthing experience itself will be examined, as well as cultural expectations and norms pertaining to birthing and how those have changed. Giving birth has historically been seen as polluting, and as such performed separate from the general

household. Perceptions towards these beliefs will be examined as well as current awareness towards them. The Japanese tradition of returning to one's familial home will also be given due consideration, as the custom is still prevalent and of interest to the current research, as that which is liminal goes away, leaves the home. The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter then examines the subsequent reintegration of the woman in her new role, having acquired her new status, as well as the accepting of the child into the community. The main rituals are those immediately following the birth and up until the child reaches one year of age. However there is still a noticeable liminal element to the child up until its 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, historically acknowledged but also expressed in current practices. Consequently Chapter 7 will look at the various ceremonies leading up to the child's entrance to school.

Finally, an overview of information gleaned will be presented and conclusions drawn, as well as suggestions posted for future research.

### **1.3 Literature overview**

There are very few works that focus in their entirety on the folklore of pregnancy and the neonate's first year. Most of the academic Japanese data gathered is to be found as chapters in books on life-cycle festivals, handbooks on folklore, ethnographies and papers on obstetrics or obstetricians' life stories, articles on history, gender studies or pollution.

Non-academic data is also to be found in pregnancy and baby magazines, almanacs, child rearing handbooks, shrine and temple Web sites, as well as pamphlets, and even sewing magazines, most of which will not be chronicled here but referenced in the thesis itself.

Hiroyuki Araki writes that 'When folklorists in Japan begin to write a paper, they usually place the Complete Works of Kunio Yanagita within arm's reach for ready reference, as well Shinobu Origuchi's Complete Works', and such is the case here. The most substantial historical treatises on pregnancy traditions and lore is volume five of the 'Maps of the Folklore of Japan' *Nihon Minzoku Chizu* [日本民俗地図], on pregnancy and childcare, from 1977, together with the 'Collection of the Manners and Customs of Childbearing' *Nihonsan*'

*iku Shūzoku Shiryō Shūsei* [日本産育習俗資料集成] from 1975. Both are based upon the results of the aggregate data from the nationwide collection of folklore collectanea by the Japanese Folkways Foundation, conducted under the auspices of the Yanagita school in the 1960s.

The 'Maps of the Folklore of Japan' is a collection of maps, together with in-depth introductory text, that map variations in folk customs pertaining to Japan, with Volume 5 mapping various customs pertaining to child bearing across Japan. The thought behind the volumes, as expressed in Volume 1, was to 'to urgently preserve folk cultural materials from across the country' (Bunkachō, 1969: 5).

The 'Collection of the Manners and Customs of Childbearing' is a 585-page assemblage of collectanea, organised by area, from which a large portion of the historical background for this thesis was gleaned. Japanese works on folklore and pregnancy will invariably cite the collection, and it is also a basic text on the history of obstetrics (Igarashi and Mori, 2004).

Of seminal importance is Yanagita's essay on *Society and Child* in 'Conversations about the Home' *Ie Kandan* [家閑談] from 1946, as is the anthropologists Takao Sofue's treatise on the regional variations of childhood ceremonies in Japan (Takao, 1965). In 'Folk Culture and the Liminality of Children' Yoshiharu discusses the liminal status of children, their sacredness and closeness to the gods, yet at the same time their incompleteness as full human beings. The anthropologist Takie Sugiyama Lebra has written extensively on Japanese society and gender roles, and it is the chapter on motherhood in *Japanese Women* from 1984 that directly relates to the current topic. Although academic, the direct quotes by women on the various aspects of motherhood lend it a somewhat ethnographic air, in some ways reminiscent of Ella Wiswell's account of Suye Mura (Smith, 1982).

Nomoto Kan'ichi, a doctor of literature, wrote on the 'Power of Motherhood' (2006) *Minzokushi Onna no Isshō: Bosei no Chikara*, [民俗誌・女の一生：母性の力], on the status of women in a historical perspective, the focus being on the older traditions pertaining to pregnancy and in particular the birthing huts. Yoshinari Naoki, in his 1996 book on the

‘Cosmology of Folk Beliefs’ *Zokushin no Kosumorojii* [俗信のコスモロジー], devotes one chapter to folk beliefs pertaining to pregnancy and birth, in particular the taboos and rituals surrounding the death of an infant and the subsequent burial customs. Various towns and municipalities have also published works on local folklore, such as Ryūgasaki city, *Ryuugasaki Shishi Minzoku-hen* [龍ヶ崎市史. 民俗編], which has a chapter devoted to pregnancy and post-partum rituals in the history of the area.

Further sources include guides to choosing a name, information booklets from shrines and temples, and annual calendar handbooks delineating auspicious and inauspicious days and years. Even sewing magazines serve as references, as Mori Etsuko points out in her thesis on the magical protective properties of amulets sewn into childrens’ kimonos and other clothing (Mori, 2007), a subject also covered by Saitō Tama in her *Sei to Mononoke* [生ともののけ] (Saitō, 40-64, 1985).

Articles and books, although covering various aspects of the folklore of pregnancy and birth, if mainly focused on the polluting elements of menstruation as well as that of birth, of which there has been a substantial amount written in both Japanese and English, will be discussed later in the section on *Mabiki* and *Mizuko kuyō*.

### **1.3.1 Works on Japanese life-cycle rituals**

Studies of life-cycle festivals have had significant impact on this thesis as they regularly chronicle the rituals leading up to both the birth and the child's first year, and although most devote only a chapter or two to pregnancy and birth, there are a few exceptions. Among contemporary scholars, the research of Itabashi Haruo has come closest to the scope of the present thesis. Itabashi has written extensively on the rituals of life transition in Japanese society. In 2001 he wrote ‘Life Passage Rites at Present’ chronicling the state of Japanese research on rites of passage. Then in 2007 he published ‘The Folklore of Birth and Death’ *Tanjō to Shi no Minzokugaku* [誕生と死の民俗学], a traditional title within the school of folklore studies in Japan for a work chronicling life-cycle rituals. In it he discusses folk beliefs surrounding pregnancy and birth, as well as developments in naming traditions in

Japan. Most recently (2009), he published ‘The History of Childbirth, Childcare and Male Midwives’ *Shussan: San' iku Shuzoku no Rekishi to Densho Dansei Sanba* [出産: 産育習俗の歴史と伝承「男性産婆」], which somewhat unusually devotes its second half to his research on the hitherto rarely mentioned male midwife in Japanese history. The first half of the book related to the present research directly as it covers traditions, superstitions and beliefs regarding childbearing in Japan, from a historical perspective.

Of equal relevance to the present work is the contribution of the folklorist Kuraishi Atsuko, who has done considerable research on life-cycle festivals in Japan. Along with Komatsu Kazuhiko and the aforementioned Miyata Noboru, they published the ‘Handbook on Lifecycle rituals’ *Jinsei Girei Jiten*, [人生儀礼事典] in 2000, which in its first 60 pages chronicles the various rituals in the life of a Japanese child, beginning in the womb and continuing through to the 3, 5 and 7 year festivals. Based on her research in Nagano prefecture, Kuraishi also published in 2001 the ‘Folklore of Children and the Elderly’ *Kodomo to Rōjin no Minzokushi* [子どもと老人の民俗誌], where she looks at the lives of both children and the elderly, her main focus being on the social dimensions.

Another work that impinges on the present research is the collection of folklife photos by the folklorist and photographer Suto Isao. A series of 10 books of photographs chronicling the various areas of Japanese society during the Showa era (1926–1989), with volume 7 depicting the various traditions associated with life-cycle occasions ‘Lifecycle Rituals’ *Jinsei Girei* [人生儀礼] from around Japan, accompanied by folkloric descriptions.

### **1.3.2 Handbooks on Japanese folklore**

Folklore handbooks frequently contain chapters on life-cycle rituals as well as other material relevant to the current research. The articles by Inoguchi Shōji ‘Childbirth and Childcare’ *Tanjō to Ikuji* and Gōda Hirobumi ‘Inauspicious Years and Life Festivals’ *Yakudoshi, toshi iwai* (also discussed in Norbeck, 1955; Yanagita, 1951: 629–630) in the ‘Compendium of Japanese Folklore’ *Nihon Minzokugaku Taikei* [日本民俗学大系] volume on Society and

folklore, *Shakai to Minzoku*, will be frequently referenced throughout. ‘Childbirth and Childcare’ is of particular importance as in it Inoguchi discusses the rituals and taboos observed by pregnant women through Japanese history.

Interestingly enough, more recent handbooks on general folklore, such as the *Seisen Nihon Minzoku Jiten* [精選日本民俗辞典] from 2006, seem to place much less importance on the life-cycle rituals.

Yanagita Kunio’s ‘Handbook of Folklore’ *Mizokugaku Jiten* [民俗学辞典] can be considered a fundamental text as it covers the basics of folklore research on childbearing in 1951. Two further works by Yanagita of direct relevance are his classified dictionary of folk vocabulary related to childbirth and childcare, *San’iku Shūzoku Goi* [産育習俗語彙], and the dictionary on vocabulary related to taboos, *Kinki Shūzoku Goi* [禁忌習俗語彙].

A book regularly taught as an introduction to Japanese folkloristics at undergraduate level is the ‘Lectures on Approaches to Folklore’ *Minzokugaku Kōgi: Seikatsu Bunka e no Apurōchi*, [民俗学講義: 生活文化へのアプローチ] by Taniguchi Mitsugi and Matsuzaki Kenzō, in which chapter 7 looks at Japanese folklore connected with birthing.

Various non-academic handbooks provide some context, although less reliable as sources. One example is ‘How should we do this? Children’s rites’ *Dōsuru? Kodomo no oiwai*, [どうする？子供のお祝い], which is not even credited with an author, merely a publishing company. It is nevertheless handy as a reference to modern childhood rituals. ‘Such Easy and Fun Folklore’ *Konnani Omoshiroi Minzokugaku: Zukai Zatsugaku E to Bunshō de Wakaruyasui!*, [こんなに面白い民俗学：図解雑学 絵と文章でわかりやすい!] is more academic in nature. Written by Tōru Yagi and Masaoka Nobuhiro (2004), it dedicates a chapter to birth rituals and superstitions. Tōru is also the author of ‘Rites of Passage in Japan’ *Nihon no Tsuka Girei* [日本の通過儀礼] from 2001, where he focuses on birth and the polluting element of blood.

### 1.3.3 Ethnographies by foreign scholars

Although an unnamed reviewer in 1892 exclaimed that ‘truly of making books on Japan there is no end’ and that ‘scarcely a month passes but we are called to welcome a book on the religious, political, social or general aspect of this well worn theme’<sup>3</sup> the truth is that not much has been written on the folklore of Japan by foreign scholars. There are some notable exceptions, particularly within the school of folk-tale studies, including Fanny Hagin Meyer, Lafcadio Hearn and Richard M. Dorson, although for the purpose of this literature review few have approached the life-cycle rituals. It is therefore towards anthropological research that we must perforce direct our attentions. In tandem with the increased interest in Japanese studies in the 1940s there emerged what Margaret Mead termed the ‘Study of a culture at a distance’ in the book by the same name. A prime example of which would be Ruth Benedict’s ‘Chrysanthemum and the Sword’ from 1946, which she wrote entirely without ever having visited Japan. Brought on by the strained relations with Japan it has been the butt for much criticism by later anthropologists mainly for the ties binding it and other anthropological works to the war effort at the time (Bennett, 1953: 404; Sofue, 1960: 307).

As Bremen acknowledges, the ‘majority of anthropologists in North America, Europe and Japan put their knowledge and ethnographic skills to martial service’ (Bremen, 2003: 24), one of whom was Edward Norbeck, who during the war ‘served in the military intelligence in matters connected with Japan’ (Norbeck, 1965: v). The work of the anthropologist Marvin Opler, which includes research on pregnancy superstition, is one of many to have come under scrutiny, having come about under the auspices of the War relocation programme in the USA. They were, however, not alone, as has been carefully chronicled by Peter T. Suzuki (Suzuki, 1981).

An in-depth overview of anthropological works on Japan by foreign anthropologists was written by the anthropologist Takao Sofue in 1960, with four anthropologists of particular interest and whose ethnographies contain material on life-cycle rituals, directly pertaining to

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<sup>3</sup> “Japan Again”, *Speaker*, 6, 1892, p. 476

the current research. The first ever social anthropological study carried out in Japan, according to Sofue, was John F. Embree's extensive field research in a rural area of Kumamoto on the southernmost Japanese island of Kyūshū between 1935 and 1936, carried out before tensions became too great between Japan and USA (Sofue, 1960: 306).

The research, conducted as part of his doctoral thesis, culminated in the seminal book 'Suye Mura: A Japanese Village', published in 1939. In the chapter on life history of the individual, he describes in some detail post-partum rituals in the village, although always maintaining a slight distance and de-personalising the account (Embree, 1946: 178).

Embree was accompanied on the fieldwork by his wife, Ella Lury Embree (later, Wiswell), who conducted her own research in Suye Mura alongside him, and subsequently published, along with Robert J. Smith, her own work on the subject, 'The Women of Suye Mura'. Whereas there is a certain distance in John Embree's account, Ella Embree's account is more personal and brings to light many of the taboos and sentiments surrounding childbearing within a given social setting.

Between 1950 and 1954, Richard K. Beardsley, John Whitney Hall and Robert E. Ward conducted research in the village of Niiike in Okayama Prefecture, the outcome of which was 'Village Japan'. Unlike the Embrees in Suye Mura, the researchers did not actually live in the village. Although informative for the purpose of this present research, their accounts are quite often generalized rather than person specific, hence occluding any variations that might have existed. Sofue has remarked that 'the year 1950 marked a new era in research on Japan', although some work was already being carried out from 1947 by anthropologists under the Civil Information and Education Section of the Occupation, it is from 1950 onwards that the ethnographies of major interest to this thesis were developed (Sofue, 1960: 308).

One of the most noteworthy protagonists from the perspective of this thesis is the post-war anthropologist Edward Norbeck. Norbeck conducted his fieldwork in the island fishing village of Takashima in Okayama prefecture between 1950 and 1951, the second half of which was spent actually living in the village itself. Being a keen observer and focusing upon



matters of religious life in society, his extensive notes on pregnancy customs and blood pollution will be frequently cited throughout. He was also prolific in translating and thereby advancing understanding by introducing the Western academic world to academic works in Japanese, such as through his papers on Taboo (1959) and Age grades (1953). Similarly, Robert J. Smith, the driving force behind the previously mentioned Ella Wiswell's (formerly Embree) ethnography on the women of Suye Mura, conducted repeated ethnographic fieldwork in Kurusu between 1951 and 1975. Of particular interest is his 'Kurusu: The Price of Progress' wherein he contrasted what he found with what he had discovered a quarter of a century earlier. His work on ancestor worship will also be cited frequently here.

These anthropological ethnographers contributed greatly to Western understanding of Japanese society and their work on pollution and life-cycle festivals, in particular that of Norbeck, served as a starting point for this thesis.

#### **1.3.4 Obstetric texts and life histories**

Directly relevant, yet not folkloric in nature, the history of midwifery and obstetrics in Japan has been well documented. Hence although not folkloric *per se*, historical treatises on obstetrics, as well as the life histories of midwives, contain quite significant elements of material relevant to the current research. A woman's first pregnancy was traditionally seen as a rite binding her to her midwife (Hardacre, 1997: 22). The terms for 'midwife' are loaded, as the different terms have political and historical connotations. The term *sanba* derives from the 1920s state move to improve public health by establishing licensed midwives rather than the traditional *toriagebāsan*, as they were previously known (Hardacre, 1997: 48). This move was mostly accomplished by 1945. According to Hardacre, the new *sanba*, with their scientific education, de-ritualised pregnancy and birth, an opinion echoed in the biography of Ei (Hardacre, 1997: 49; Ochiai, 1999: 254). In 1949 there was yet another re-organisation of midwives, with their title becoming *josanpu*, a meaning closer to maternity nurse, and indicative of their status being more that of an assistant to the doctors who possessed the actual knowledge.

Ogata Masakiyo wrote his thesis in Freiburg (1891) on the history on midwifery in Japan ‘Contribution to the History of Obstetrics in Japan’ *Beitrag zur Geschichte der Geburtshülfe in Japan*, which he followed up by writing ‘The History of Midwifery in Japan’ *Nihon Fujin Kagakushi* [日本婦人科学史], in 1914. Both give an overview of standard practices at the time, as well as a historical perspective, with some folklore to be gleaned from the text. The publications served as the basis for one of the very few non-Japanese texts on pregnancy and birthing with an emphasis on the historical and folklore aspect, namely Mary W. Standlee's (1959) book on Japanese midwifery.

More recently, Nishikawa Setsuko wrote in 1992 on ‘The Sagacity of Midwives: Sharing of Women’s Life Stories’ *Osan no Chie: Tsutaete Okitai Onna no Kurashi*, [お産の知恵 : 伝えておきたい女の暮らし], where in the first two chapters she looks at birthing through the history of Japan, bringing to light the cultural status of the midwife and her role in the post-partum rituals, as well as discussing the changes in traditions surrounding parturition in Japanese society.

Similarly, Sugitatsu Yoshikazu (2002) discusses, in his ‘History of Midwifery, from the Jōmon Period to Present Day’ *Osan no Rekishi: Jōmon Jidai kara Gendai made* [お産の歴史 : 縄文時代から現代まで] the history of midwifery from the earliest chronicled days of Japan to the present era. Although a medical doctor and neither a folklorist nor a historian, his treatise enumerates a number of traditions and beliefs surrounding childbirth, in particular those of pollution and birthing huts, a subject later looked at in depth by Tonomura Hitomi in her historiography of the birthing huts, *Ubuya*, in Japan (Tonomura, 2007).

All of the above focus on the norm or usual in Japanese society, whereas the next reference looks at Ainu birthing customs. The Ainu of Hokkaido, having been persecuted for centuries, have in parts held fast to their traditions and, reflecting the fact that this book is most often mentioned on New Age spiritualistic Web pages, it would seem to be perceived as older wisdom. Recorded by Hiroshi Nagano, the ‘Traditional Wisdom of an Ainu birthing granny’ *Ainu o-Sanba-chan no Upashikuma: Denshō no Chie no Kiroku* [アイヌお産ばあち

やんのウパシクマ : 伝承の知恵の記録] chronicles the life and experiences of the midwife Aiko Aoki (1914–1995). Aiko, having been born into a family of midwives, is a prime example of the continuation of tradition within a relatively closed environment.

### 1.3.5 Works on Blood Pollution

Central to the idea of liminality is the idea of pollution, with societies likely to see things as ‘taboo’ when they are anomalous and do not fit neatly into a society's classification of the world. There have been numerous works on impurity or pollution, or both, in Japanese society, by both Western and Japanese scholars. The previously mentioned Miyata Noboru and the anthropologists Edward Norbeck, Namihira Emiko and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, have all approached the concept of ritual pollution in Japanese society. Throughout ‘Purity and Danger’, Mary Douglas (2002) expressed the belief that things that exist at the borders of society, or on the boundaries between categories, are perceived as possessing both power and danger. Death, birth and pregnancy exist at the border between different stages of life, and are frequently surrounded by taboos. Profane and sacred are religious phenomena that ‘always assumes a binary division of the known and knowable universe into two genera that include all that exists but radically exclude each other’ (Durkheim, 2001: 40), where sacred things are those protected and isolated by prohibitions, in contrast to profane, being that to which prohibitions apply and must be kept at a distance from that which is sacred.

The Japanese conception of pollution is a tripartite one: pollution, *Kegare*; neutrality or secular, *Ke*; and purity or sacred, *Hare*. *Hare* refers to space, time, objects and phenomena out of the ordinary, as opposed to *ke*, which refers to the mundane or day-to-day property. The state of *Hare* is brought about by the accumulation of rituals as it is the antithesis of *Kegare*. Also of note is the term *imi*, abstinence or taboo (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1987: 140; Norbeck, 1952: 269; Miyata, 1996: 143). As the gods in Shinto and folk belief only appear under conditions of absolute purity, most rituals aim to remove the pollution caused by death, anything connected with death, pregnancy, childbirth, bleeding, illness, violations of taboos,

crimes and even sexual activity: all pollutants that if let run amok invite danger and misfortune (Namiyara, 1987: 65).

The main sources of *kegare* are menstruation, childbirth and death (Norbeck, 1952: 271) in the form of *shi-e* [death impurity], *ketsu-e* [blood impurity] and *san-e* [childbirth impurity] (Abe, 2003: 5). Pollution from death is *kuro fujō*, or black uncleanness, whereas the pollution connected to women, childbirth and menstruation is often termed *aka fujō*, red uncleanness. (Namiyara, 1987: 68; Norbeck, 1952: 276–278).

Having contact with *kegare* is referred to as *shoku-e* [touching *kegare*] and exemplifies the contagious element of the pollution. Blood was a harmful and impersonal power; contact with blood and death resulted in harmful pollution, dangerous to others and the gods. Not only was it contagious by direct contact but also through handling objects or its being in a place considered holy (Abe, 2003: 13; Norbeck, 1961: 41).

It is worth noting that, although pollution is mainly found in connection with death and blood, it can also be connected to crime, as the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, compiled in AD 712 and AD 720, respectively, would indicate (Namiyara, 1987: 69). The main source of illness is also seen as directly linked to pollution, being visited upon those who have transgressed, broken taboos or not properly conducted rites for the deceased (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1987: 137).

It has been argued by Abe Chikara that, in ancient Japanese society, women were anything but impure and that they were considered to be closer to the gods. This is exemplified by historical empresses and goddesses, but a change occurred in the 14th century, when *Ketsubon Kyō* was introduced from China (Abe, 2003: 15). Wakita argues that the change—the belief in women’s defilement—did not become rampant until in the Edo period (Wakita, 1984: 97). The only taboo regarding childbirth mentioned in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* is the commandment of not looking at a woman during childbirth. Namiyara, however, notes that from the beginning of the 9th century, for people taking part in particular rituals, childbirth was being treated as a pollution akin to death in the Imperial court, as well as in the Ise shrines. By the end of the Heian period, a post-partum woman had to wait 30 days before

visiting a shrine, and later this was extended to 100 days (Namihara, 1987: 68).

Whatever the situation, there is ample information on the perceived polluting influence of women. A menstruating woman had to avoid all contact with the Shinto deities for fear of polluting or offending them. Should she by necessity have to go to one, she was not supposed to pass through the Shrine gate, *torii*, but rather walk around it. In some homes, pinches of salt were placed on the household shrine for purification (Norbeck, 1952: 271). Norbeck goes on to say that, at the time of writing (1952), the pollution conceptually associated with menstruation had abated considerably, but that a woman would still take care when dealing with the gods for fear of transmitting the pollution (Norbeck, 1952: 272). Ella Lury Wiswell [Embree] mentions that during her stay in Japan (1935) the women were aware of the pollution of menses but still continued about their business as usual, although the matter was of some embarrassment, with some mentioning that to go to a Shinto shrine was not acceptable, but that a Buddhist temple was fine (Smith, 1982: 85).

In 1965, Namihara found that in a mountain village in Niigata the pollution of birth was so strongly observed that for 21 days after birth it was taboo for a man to eat meals in their own home (Namihara, 1987: 68). This was an element of “Not mixing the fire” with a menstruating or a post-partum woman, resulting in the meals being prepared separately, and even eaten at separate tables (Norbeck, 1952: 271). These ritual pollutions are also evident in the menstrual and birthing huts, which will be discussed in the chapter on birthing.

According to *Engishiki*, an AD 927 book of law, a person with death impurity, *shi-e* had to be secluded from others for 30 days. A woman carrying childbirth impurity, however, had only to be secluded for 7 days (Abe, 2003: 17), implying less pollution stemming from childbirth than from death.

Nevertheless, the pollution of menstruation and childbirth was not solely a Shinto characteristic. The aforementioned *Ketsubon Kyō* is a Buddhist sutra that teaches salvation for women who have fallen into hell because of the pollution of blood. A dialogue between a disciple of Buddha and a demon discusses why women are considered impure enough to be

tortured in hell upon death. Takemi Momoko has done an in-depth study of the variants of the sutras, as well as development of the sutra. It is interesting that the earlier texts focus on the pollution of the blood surrounding childbirth, whereas from the beginning of the Edo period the focus changed to one of menstrual pollution (Takemi, 1983: 235). Hardacre has, however, taken this as an example of how the rituals ‘reflected the misogyny of the tradition and the way it absorbed folk notions about the pollution of women’ (Hardacre, 1997: 26).

In a publication from 1801–03, *Random Stories about the Buddhist Ceremonies – the Origins and the Distribution of the Ketsubon Kyō*, pollution from menstruation is explained thus:

Because they were born as women, their aspirations to Buddhahood are weak, and their jealousy and evil character are strong. These sins compounded become menstrual blood, which flows in two streams each month, polluting not only the earth god but all the other deities as well. Thus after death they will certainly fall into this Hell, where they will undergo unlimited suffering.

The belief in *Ketsubon Kyō* has all but died out according to Takemi (Takemi, 1983: 239). However the idea of the polluting element of women still remains under certain circumstances, such as when in 1990 the Japan Sumo Association rejected the possibility of the then Chief Cabinet Secretary, Ms Moriyama, handing the Prime Minister’s prize to the Sumo champion, as she would have polluted the sacred *dohyō*, the sumo wrestling ring.

*Shi-e*, death impurity, was the most serious of all *kegare* (Abe, 2003: 10). The Shinto tradition, as has been noted before, displayed an intense aversion to corpses and anything connected with death, causing it to be surrounded by a plethora of taboos (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 307). Great distinction is made between that which pertains to daily life and all that pertains to the dead. Behaviour, utensils and clothing connected with rituals for the dead are well defined, and mixing these into daily life is considered very inauspicious, a bad omen *engi ga warui* [縁起が悪い].

Rituals surrounding the dead are exemplified by reversals. Nearly everything is reversed: the kimono lapel is set right side over whereas normally the left is over; the funeral

water ladle handled by the left hand, the hand of death in Shinto. The water used to cleanse the body is heated by adding hot water to cold, instead of the usual way of cooling water down. Quilts are placed with the pattern upside down, and the soup for the funeral meal is placed on the left side of the rice instead of the right. People also generally avoid sleeping with their head facing north, seeing as that is the direction in which a corpse is laid out—a reversal Norbeck finds symbolic of the transitional element of death (Norbeck, 1961: 74). The dead are in limen, neither fully here nor there. These examples may not sound serious, but accidental faux pas by foreigners bring clearly to light how strong the sentiment is still to this day.

The dead of Japanese society continue, however, to be very much a part of normal life, as exemplified by the Buddhist tradition of calling back of ancestral spirits at *o-Bon*, the numerous rituals for the departed, and the general ancestral worship of Shinto. The spirits do not go far to begin with, with the recently departed considered to be in limbo, still very near, as exemplified by the terms associated with the spirits of the dead: *konoyo*, precinct of the living; *sonoyo*, the middle ground; and *anoyo*, which is the other side or the other world (Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994: 16).

Death is a liminal period, and various rituals and stages must be undertaken before the dead become properly dead (Smith, 1974: 100). Upon arriving in Japan, Buddhism had no funerary service, but ‘as Buddhism came to Japan by way of China, the land of ancestor cults, it became slowly involved with ancestor veneration’ (Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994: 20). The Heian period (AD 794 to 1185) is considered the time of transition, as during a great famine the Buddhist monks would bury people as well as read sutras, which according to Iwasaki and Toelken seems to have marked the beginning of Buddhist funeral practices, and in doing so they appropriated and further developed a complicated system that was already in place (Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994: 21).

The spirit of the deceased is considered to stay in limbo until the 49th day. On the *shonanka* [seventh day following a death], a ceremony referred to as *hōji* is conducted,

based on the belief that the spirit returns home at that point, and then on the *Shijū-kunichi* [49th day] it is believed that the soul starts its life on the other side (Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994: 24). The dates vary somewhat between areas. Following this there are annual anniversaries to be observed: the first, second, third, seventh, 13th, 17th, 23rd or 25th, 27th, 33rd and occasionally the 50th and the 100th. Without these observances even a good person who was consigned to heaven can be endangered and fall into hell.

As was mentioned earlier, children under seven were considered to be of the gods, and hence there are indications that children before the age of seven did not receive full funerary services and infants or foetuses—as will be seen in the chapter on *mizuko kuyō*—received very different rites. Hoshino and Dōshō mention the custom of placing the ancestral tablets of children and *mizuko* under, rather than on, the shelves of the *shōryōdana* [spirit altar] during *o-bon*, where their offerings are also placed (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 308).

Death during birthing is double taboo; it is not the natural order of things. Seeing as both mother and child are in a state of limen, betwixt and between, both are subject to the numerous taboos and supernatural threats that pervade both the process and circumstances. The idea of women suffering through dying in childbirth has been around in Japanese culture for quite some time. As can be seen in story 9 of Volume 3 in the *Nihon ryōiki*, Japan's oldest collection of Buddhist *setsuwa* [tales], written down between AD 787 and 824, which tells of a woman who went to hell because she died before giving birth to her child.

Specific funeral rites existed for women who died in childbirth. *Nagare kanjō* [flowing funeral] described in 1880 by the traveller Isabella Bird as a flowing invocation involving the kimono of ‘mother in the first joy of Maternity’ that has passed away, or parts thereof being strung up between four poles in running water close to a well travelled bridge or road. Each passer by would then dribble some water on the kimono as they passed so as to take part in the cleansing of the pollution. She describes having frequently come across flowing invocations in the province of Echigo (Bird, 1984: 135). Ghost stories involving mothers who died in birth or whilst pregnant abound. Referred to as *Ubume*, the ghost that looks after her



child, often the stories tell of a ghostly woman with her hair down approaching a shopkeeper at night to buy a sweet, one at a time. Upon further investigation, the coffin is then opened and she turns out to have had the child in the coffin, with the ghost trying to feed the dying infant (Hardacre, 1997: 26; Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994: 70). Iwasaka and Toelken also tell of the custom of separating a dead fetus from a woman who had died pregnant and burying it either folded in her arms or at her back so as to avoid her returning for her child; this they then connect to the recent trend of *Mizuko kuyō* (Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994: 70).

Iwasaka and Toelken have discussed in detail *ubume* and *Kosodate-Yūrei* —the wealth of ghost stories pertaining to the ghosts of pregnant women, and they argue that it is the absence of ritual admission of the child as a newcomer and the inadequacy of the mother’s rituals that cause them to pose a danger to society.

### **1.3.6 Works on *Mizuko Kuyō* and *Mabiki***

In the past three decades there has been a lot of research regarding *Mizuko*, *Mizuko Kuyō* and the very visible *Mizuko Jizō* (Brooks, 1981; Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987; Harrison, 1999; Underwood, 1999; Hardacre, 1997; LaFleur, 1999). Before we can examine the *mizuko* we must perforce first examine *Mabiki* [間引き], literally translated as ‘thinning out’ (Harrison, 1999: 778; Hanley, 1997: 143; Iijima, 1987: 41). *Mabiki* pertains to the act of infanticide, although with very different social connotations from what the reader would expect. Infanticide is generally acknowledged to have been rampant in Japanese society during the Edo period (1603–1868), but was made a capital crime in the Meiji period (1868–1912) (Hane, 1982: 209; Condon, 1992: 86). However, as Harrison has pointed out, there were anti-infanticide messages being circulated as early as the 19th century, bearing messages about the evilness of people who “gave back” their children (Harrison, 1999: 783). This form of population control was very unusual by international standards at a time when most societies opted for as many children as possible, Hanley has argued that this was a socio-cultural phenomenon, often maintained through social pressure, for instance by ridicule over having more than three children (Hanley, 1997: 150).

Of greater importance to this research and descriptive of the liminal status of the newborn infant is that ‘Midwives asked whether the newborn was to be kept or “sent back” (*oku ka, kaesu ka*) to the world of the gods from which it had come’ (Hardacre, 1997: 25). Echoing the thought that until the age of seven the child is of the ‘gods’, *Kami*, and suggesting that a child that died before seven returned to the *kami* from whence they came, and hence it did not need a proper funeral (Harrison, 1999: 779; Iijima, 1987: 41). As noted elsewhere, there was a certain element of the child not becoming a real person until some period after birth. Harrison cites as evidence examples of folk customs such as not giving the child a name and not putting its arms through sleeves for a certain number of days (Harrison, 1999: 779). Hoshino and Dōshō even mention references to there having been separate graveyards for children in some parts of the country, called *kobaka* (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 308, 314).

Hoshino and Dōshō also mention customs such as placing sardines or some other fish in the mouth or casket of a child or *mizuko* before burial, and surmise that it was done to prevent the child from attaining Buddhahood so as to be able to be reborn into this world (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 308; Hardacre, 1997: 43; Iijima, 1987: 42). The fish was thought to repel Buddha, allowing the infant to be reborn quickly—a thought also expressed in the belief that children were thrown into the pond *ko-naki-ike* by mothers thinking they would not survive the famine but would reach nirvana and thus have the opportunity to be born again (Brooks, 1981: 130).

The term *mizuko*, literally ‘water child’, has been used since the Edo period for those who died by miscarriage, aborted foetuses, stillborn infants, infants that die in their first week, and victims of infanticide. *Kuyō* is the Buddhist memorial service for the comfort of the dead and *jizō* statues are childlike representations of Buddha, more properly known as *Bodhisattva Jizō* (Kshitigarbha). The belief is that in the absence of proper funerary rites, the spirit of the child can not proceed, and thus brings pollution or ghostly afflictions upon the family into which it was supposed to be born.

The *Jizō* statues have been around for a long time and are often to be found by roadsides,

protecting travellers on their way (Kitagawa, 1966: 84), and the *kosodate Jizō* protect children from mishaps and illnesses.<sup>4</sup> Numerous folk tales describe their kindness, appreciation of goodwill and their forgiveness, and they are generally regarded as benevolent gods. Kitagawa states that *Jizō* ‘was believed to stand between this world and the next and to save those who were on their way to hell’ (Kitagawa, 1966: 82).

It is only in later years they have become associated with *Mizuko*. In recent years the ready availability of *Mizuko Kuyō*, a memorial service to appease an aborted foetus, has become more and more obvious, with social discord rising from the price of such services as well as the apparent manipulateness, which, as Hoshino and Dōshō so nicely phrase it, ‘strikes one as pernicious business’ (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 305; Harrison, 1999: 770). There is a constant bombardment through advertisements and the mass media about the afflictions these water babies bring to their families; any ailment in the family or ill luck is attributed to their presence (Namihiro, 1987: 67). Their souls are considered to be *Urami*, displaced spirits that wreak havoc with the living (Brooks, 1981: 136). The controversy is made evident by the fact that *Jōdo Shinshū*, Japan’s largest Buddhist sect, rejects the memorial service for aborted fetuses (Hardacre, 1997: 9).

Abortions under certain circumstances have been legal since the passing of the National Eugenics law in 1940. It was superseded in 1948 with the passing of the Eugenic Protection Law, with abortions being allowed in cases of rape and leprosy, and then in 1949 they expanded to include danger to the well-being of the mother and for economic reasons (Harrison, 1999: 772; Coleman, 1983: 53–56). Hence abortions have not been directly frowned upon by society.

There are strongly differing opinions on *Mizuko kuyō* within the scholarship: those who argue the complete redundancy of such ceremonies and the money-grabbing priesthood (Hardacre, 1997; Werblowsky, 1991) versus the idea expressed by Underwood of ‘People are not cultural *dupes* nor are they cultural *dopes*’. Nevertheless, they are negotiators of culture

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<sup>4</sup> For further reading on *jizō* see Lafcadio Hearn, 1894: 44.

and hence the ritual performance meets a religious need (Underwood, 1999: 740; Harrison, 1999).

Harrison (1999: 793) argues

It is the product of a new articulation of the relationship between the spirits of the dead and the welfare of the nation, and of a newly constructed recognition of the existence of spirits of dead children and their need for care.

Children not being considered to be a part of society until the age of seven was demonstrated by the fact that until that age they were not eligible for formal funerary services. They were perceived as being of the gods rather than beholden to the laws of Buddhism. In modern society, however, as expressed by Hoshino and Dōshō, children and aborted fetuses are considered human, living entities entitled to life. No longer is there the dichotomy between the souls of children and adults, no longer is the child's life likelihood diminished, and no longer do people belong to large social groups where these decisions would be accepted openly. Hence, they argue, the fact that abortion is no longer necessitated by dire situation, that the child would have in all likelihood reached full maturity due to material prosperity and that the decision is reached within a small nuclear household will in all likelihood invoke feelings of guilt towards the taking of life coupled with the potential harmfulness of the spirit of the child, therefore explaining the popularity of *mizuko kuyō* in modern day society (Hoshino and Dōshō, 1987: 315; Brooks, 1981: 133–137).

## **1.4 Chapter review**

This literature review, while not claiming to be exhaustive, is hopefully representative of the scholarship on the folklore surrounding pregnancy in Japanese society. An attempt has been made to delineate the background information and concepts behind the thesis whilst not getting lost in minutiae. While the many works noted above have influenced the research questions and aims, it is notable that almost none focus specifically on the taboos and rituals surrounding pregnancy and birth. The source material is scattered amongst a variety of disciplines, as well as types of works. Secondary literature, or rather non-academic sources, have not been enumerated here, but will constitute a significant portion of the material that will be examined in this research.

Scholarly focus on the subject has changed over time, with older references from Japan focusing more on collectanea pertaining to pregnancy rather than social significance, whereas older references of Western origin have focused more on life-cycle rituals within the society, as well as on the polluting element of child bearing.

In more modern times, Western scholars have turned their attentions to the extremes, with *mizuko kuyō* being the most discussed topic pertaining to child bearing, seconded only by pollution and *Mabiki*. Japanese scholars still seem to focus their aim on particular items of folklore, in particular on a geographical basis, although research into the rituals of life cycles have widened the breadth of the field.

Recent scholarship on childbirth and rites of passage outside of Japan has seemed to focus upon the birthing experience itself as a rite of passage, 'Placing emphasis upon the differences between the idea of a holistic birth and technocratic birth' (Davis-Floyd, 1992). In that vein, Deborah Fiedler has done in-depth research on the differences between hospitals and midwife-operated clinics in Japan, finding contrasting elements yet finding both institutional (Fiedler, 1996: 195–212).

It is hoped that this literature review has revealed that, although much has been written on the various areas of the childbirth experience, the field seems wanting in writings of a scholarly nature that look at modern day taboos and rituals, pertaining to both the pre- and post-partum child as well as the mother, contrasting modern Japanese data with older references, from the perspective of a rite of passage. The closest would be Itabashi Haruo's treatise on the Folklore of Birth and Death (Itabashi, 2007), which, although quantitative and history-orientated, bears emphasis similar to the current work. However, the author has yet to find any traces of recent relevant English-language work of a folkloristic nature. Published work has been primarily anthropological in nature and focused on the aberrations rather than the usual.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### 2.1 *Fieldwork and methodology in Folklore*

As was discussed in the previous chapter on the academic background of the early studies of folklore, fieldwork in folklore rode on the back of romanticism, nationalism and colonialism. As such it was very much focused on the study of the “other”, collecting and “rescuing” remnants of soon-to-be extinct customs and traditions.

We are stuck with the history of the discipline, whether we like it or not. As I see it, however, it is our duty as its heirs to engage that history, to understand how its developments have constructed the materials, methods, and boundaries of our discipline, and to define the positions we occupy vis-à-vis those taken by our predecessors (Hafstein, 2005: 408).

Methodologies in the field of folklore have come a long way since the early days of folklore research. However as an academic field is clearly based upon the developments within it, one must perforce pay due attention to the pattern of developments within folklore research and the associated fieldwork methodologies. It is therefore appropriate to remind ourselves of the main theories in folklore methodology and their position in the chronology of that discipline.

Early folklore research focused on items of collectanea, non-personal items of folklore, which were then compiled and compared with similar items from other places, and due to the urgency involved in accruing this “fast-disappearing body of remnant knowledge”, it was for the most part collected by non-folklorists. It was then the scholar’s responsibility to collect these tidbits and to “correct” them should the versions they collected not match the preconceptions colouring the scholars’ expectations. “Folklorists felt that what presumably were the oldest traditions preserved the spirit and lifestyles of the ‘folk’ most faithfully; and if the traditions they found appeared fragmentary and deteriorated, it was the task of the collectors and editors to ‘restore’ them” (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 1989: 4). Not all promoted corrections though, but placed emphasis on the correctness of the material collected. This and the non-specialist background of the collectors is exemplified in *Notes and Queries*

on *Anthropology* from 1899 (first edition 1874) where notes on collecting are prefaced with the comment “to promote accurate anthropological observation on the part of travellers, and to enable those who are not anthropologists themselves to supply the information which is wanted for the scientific study of anthropology at home” (BAAS, 1899: vii).

Thus early literature and handbooks on fieldwork tended to focus on the material to be collected rather than the method with which the collection was to take place or the larger social context in which these items had developed and, according to the theories of the time, “survived”. Actual guidelines for the collector during the early days of folklore research were few and far between. An early example, however, is to be found in *The Handbook of Folklore*, where Charlotte Burne dedicates a chapter on how to collect and record folklore, aimed at “travellers or residents among backwards folk at home and abroad” collecting among the “uncultured classes of more advanced peoples” (Burne, 1914: 1). There she warns that “The field of research is vast, and “Expeditions” cannot hope to cover it before it is “developed” out of existence” (Burne, 1914: 6), indicating that the approach is one filled with prejudice towards the informants, that the purpose is that of saving of remnant items of folklore kept alive by the uneducated. Although this condescending tone reverberates throughout the book, she does give somewhat more insightful advice to the collectors, indicating a more liberal, modern approach when she declares that “the first requisite in collecting folklore is to enter into friendly relations with the folk.” She also cautions future collectors that “anything in the way of condescension, patronage, or implied superiority will be a fatal barrier to success, and any display of wealth in dress or equipage should be avoided” (Burne, 1914: 6). Further to that, she emphasises that “Sympathy, a true ‘feeling with’ and not merely ‘for’ the people, is the main secret of success. The greatest possible respect should be shown to all their beliefs and opinions, even the most trivial” (Burne, 1914: 7).

In 1926, Karle Krohn published his *Die Folkloristische Arbeitsmethode*<sup>5</sup> which served as

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<sup>5</sup> Published as *Folklore Methodology: Formulated by Julius Krohn and Expanded by Nordic Researchers in English* in 1971.

the main text in the methodology of the Finnish school of folklore, the historico-geographical method, which was primarily concerned with the origins and dissemination of folktales. As a guidebook for the collectors of folklore, it advocated delimiting one's research field, and divided folklore into categories so as to assist with delineation of the research. Although he perceived traditional knowledge as something soon to be made extinct by literary education, his perception of the "folk" as being a varied group and not merely uneducated shows a marked change from earlier handbooks (Krohn, 1971: 45).

After Krohn there was little in the way of handbooks on folklore fieldwork until the middle of the 20th century, an era that saw a shift within the study of social sciences in general, and specifically within anthropology there was a move away from physical anthropology towards the study of society *sensu lato*. Eventually, researchers of folklore were forced from their position as the collectors of the archaic by the dawning emphasis on context and performance. Arguments were made for the idea of the "objective" researcher as an unrealistic ideal with anthropologists such as Whorf pointing out that we do not "objectively" collect and interpret ethnographic data, and that even the process of basic data collection is heavily influenced by the native culture of the anthropologist (Whorf, 1952: 5). This focus on the self was a substantial change from previous theories of fieldwork.

Kenneth Goldstein's *Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore* in 1964, a handbook still recommended for folklore fieldwork studies, heralded an era of ethnographically based fieldwork, wherein the collection of extensive background and contextual information was strongly advocated. His "scientific inquiry" involved five stages, and he advocated that during the collecting the fieldworker should "treat data as facts which are independent of any school of thought, theory or approach" (Goldstein, 1964: 8). Although closest to modern day folklore approaches to fieldwork, certain passages feel outdated, as, for instance, his suggestion of the boons involved with bringing one's wife to the field. Not only would they be involved in provision of food, drink and domestic comfort, but she could also act as a secretary whilst the academic was out in the field, as well as being able to gain access to the very elusive women's



lore (Goldstein, 1964). Nevertheless, the relevance of the book is irrefutable as his was the introduction of the concepts of context-sensitive performance that remains one of folklore's main methodological approaches.

The 1960s and 1970s were a transitional period in folklore methodology as the interpretative approach brought on by post-modernist theories demanded both external and internal discourses. Up until then the goal had always been the text itself, the items of folklore, amassing, as Ruth Finnegan phrased it “extensive archives with little analysis” (Finnegan, 1992: 10). What followed was the advent of the interpretative approach, a relativist approach aware of the complexities of folklore fieldwork that Clifford Geertz promoted in his *Interpretation of Cultures*. Context became of prime importance, as exemplified in the following excerpt from 1971 by Dan Ben-Amos:

Folklore is very much an organic phenomenon in the sense that it is an integral part of culture. Any divorce of tales, songs, or sculptures from their indigenous locale, time, and society inevitably introduces qualitative changes into them. The social context, the cultural attitude, the rhetorical situation, and the individual aptitude are variables that produce distinct differences in the structure, text, and texture of the ultimate verbal, musical, or plastic product. (Ben-Amos, 1971: 4)

The need for universal causal theories was replaced by attention to context, seeking the meaning of a text within its context (Ben-Amos, 1993: 210).

A similar development was occurring in Scandinavia, as the first Nordic seminar in fieldwork methods, organized by NEFA<sup>6</sup> in 1965, resulted in a fieldwork guide in 1968, the main emphasis of which was on the production of contextual data in interviews. “As methodological procedures were refined, techniques were developed to reveal personal attitudes and social values and norms”, resulting in a sharp decline in the utilisation of archival materials and a similarly sharp increase in the use of newly gathered empirical data (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 1989: 6).

These new theories were also articulated in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, a

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<sup>6</sup> Nordisk Ethnologisk-Folkloristisk Arbejdsgruppe [Nordic Work Group in Ethnology and Folklore].

collection of articles the momentum for which originated in a discussion between North American and South American folklorists as to the nature of folklore and the perceived lack of a theoretical approach by the North American scholars during a conference. This new articulation became first a special issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1971, and was later published as a book (1972). The authors represented, according to Richard Bauman, “a new generation of folklorists who were not content to remain within the confines of inherited intellectual pigeonholes” (Paredes and Bauman, 1972: ix).

As can be seen from the above, the major development within folklore fieldwork methodology has largely been the subtle shift from non-personal items of texts, items of folklore, towards a greater awareness of context, the situational settings in which folklore is to be found. As well as the notable redefinition of the “other”, one remains with the conceptual question: define “folk”. Or in the words of Beverly Stoeltje “Over time, an emphasis on context and performance wrested the researcher from this artificially privileged position as collector of archaic, antiquated texts. It erased the notion that folklore was restricted to marginal groups or minorities, and abolished the idea that an elite class was required to collect those fragments from the past” (Stoeltje *et al.*, 1999: 168).

## **2.2 Development and pilot study**

When formulating the initial methodology for the current research it soon became obvious that employing a mixed method would probably yield the best results. Thus the information forming the basis for this research was obtained through observation, historical research, interaction, newspaper and magazines, questionnaire and interviews. As the material was experience- and perception-based, and being private for the greater part, coupled with my inability to attend in person, I relied primarily on a research method grounded in ethnographic and personal narrative documentation in order to bring out the data necessary, namely the use of interviews.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world ... qualitative

researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide-range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 3).

Although the above description could give the impression that qualitative research is a veritable quagmire of contradicting methodology, a single approach would probably have yielded inadequate material for an in-depth study of acceptable academic rigour, and as Ilene B. Harris puts it “there is a wide variety of threads interwoven under the rubric ‘qualitative methods’ ” interwoven being the operative word as a thread is only one dimensional whereas a tapestry can show us a picture. (Harris, 2002: 45).

Qualitative research being inductive, the informants are given leeway in their responses, with their experiences interrelated, giving them the chance to interject topics, to veer as well as attribute meanings that may lead the research into a new direction.

Hence, although both the questionnaire and the interviews employed a mixed method approach involving both open and semi-structured questions, the main emphasis was primarily on the open ones.

The preliminary bibliographical research was conducted both in Britain using the library facilities of Sheffield University and Edinburgh University, as well as in Japan at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo. The preparation of the questionnaire involved preliminary interviews in Japan, as well as less formal conversations with professors and students at Kokugakuin, and other mothers at my children’s primary school<sup>7</sup> so as to glean the direction best to take. An early research direction that had been based on folklore collections<sup>8</sup> as well as previous research in Iceland (Thorgeirsdottir, 2006) was markedly changed by those interactions, and

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<sup>7</sup> Takayama Primary School in Mitaka 181-0002 東京都三鷹市牟礼4丁目6-1 2

<sup>8</sup> In particular Nihonsan’ iku Shūzoku Shiryō Shūsei [日本産育習俗資料集成 ‘Collection of the Manners and Customs of Child-bearing’]

the focus widened so as to incorporate the pregnancy and the post-pregnancy rituals, which as it transpired, were of greater personal and narrative import than the preliminary research had indicated.

Through the gracious courtesy of Professor Itabashi Haruo and the assistance of fellow students I was able to give the questionnaire a pilot run before placing it online, receiving both linguistic and content feedback invaluable in rendering the research both more focused where needed and providing a better, broader contextual environment.

### ***2.3 Recruitment and sampling***

Sampling was twofold: for the questionnaire. I entreated all friends and contacts with connections with Japan to share with friends and family. I handed out flyers among colleagues at Kokugakuin University, as well as among parents at Takayama primary school. The link to the questionnaire was also posted on social websites. On Facebook it was shared in the form of private messages as well as a public request on my private page, thus only visible to friends. On Mixi, the link was however posted on two message boards in groups dedicated to the pregnancy experience, mostly patronized by expectant and new mothers. The link was also posted on Myspace, but given the paucity of Japanese contacts therein I doubt that the Myspace link yielded many, if any, responses. As the questionnaire contained no questions on how they came to find it, I only have personal accounts, and comments left in the comments section of the questionnaire, from which to deduce the mode by which the respondents found their way to the Web site. From those comments it appears that the large majority of respondents had a personal connection up to the second degree.

As to the interviews, although a pure purposive sampling design would have been preferable, limited access to informants naturally steered the research towards a modification thereof, namely referral or ‘snowballing’, as one respondent would lead to another. Initially I petitioned friends and colleagues both to interview as well as to canvass amongst friends and family members for further informants. As the interviews progressed the snowballing effect became evident and contacts were made with friends and family members who were

amenable to being interviewed. Those were all based in the greater Tokyo area, and with only few exceptions were originally from Tokyo or adjacent prefectures.

A second line of sampling occurred through contacts in Akita prefecture, where I had lived with a host family as an exchange student in 1991 and 1992 and maintained close contact with both the family and friends there. Half of the interviews were obtained there.

Obviously consideration needs to be made of the fact that everyone involved was willing to talk to the foreign scholar, and that presumably a number of people were approached who were not. How that affects the data accrued is hard to say. Consequently, and also due to constrictions of research time and means, the sampling is not as comprehensive as the researcher would have wished. This then opens up the possibilities for future research.

## ***2.4 Ethical considerations***

There were various ethical considerations of which to be aware. First and foremost there were the obvious issues of privacy and respect, particularly in questions addressing a private aspect of life, but then there is also potential bias, not only from my own prejudices and possibly skewed perception, but also reflecting accessibility due my visibly perceivable status as a female, mother and a non native.

The questionnaire was introduced by an information sheet, containing an overview of the study at hand and its purpose. Precise information was provided on how the data was likely to be used, with assurances that all responses would be kept fully confidential. The introductory page also contained contact information for myself as well as my department, and confirmed that the project had been approved under the School of East Asian Studies departmental Ethics Review Procedure. Thus the sheet served as an informed consent form.

Before each interview I introduced myself, explained the purpose and the scope of the research, how the information was likely to be used, and emphasised that at no point would any of the information released be traceable back to them. I also advised them that should they at any time wish to leave the interview or skip a question that would be perfectly

acceptable.

The signing of the consent form was very unfamiliar to most of the respondents and a few warned me that this might negatively impact other, less informed informants, resulting in them refusing to take part. Fortunately this was not the case, although many expressed surprise and slight hesitancy in signing a document, but as two respondents told me, as it was not their signature seal (*hanko*) it was all right. Most thought it a quaint foreign custom.

Some consideration needs to be taken of my own status upon venturing into this research topic. As has been drawn to attention by Beverly Stoeltje, one's status, such as gender, marital status, being native or a stranger, having children or not, can affect a study considerably through the way relationships with the informants are formed, and consequently influence the results of the study. (Stoeltje *et al.*, 1990: 166). At the time of the research I was a 35-year-old mother of a 7-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. My immediately discernible status as a female, I believe, had a strong influence on whether the women were willing to discuss such matters with me, and the fact that I had myself borne children, as well as academically researched the subject both in my own and their culture, intrigued them. I find it unlikely that such a close rapport could have been reached had I been a non-native male, for instance. Jackson advocates suitable preliminary knowledge before heading out into the field, both as a sign of respect for the informants and also in order to be able to make the most of the material collected (Jackson, 1987: 23). I had previously researched contemporary beliefs pertaining to pregnancy in Iceland and Britain, for my M.A. thesis and believe that the previous research not only gave me insight into and understanding of the subject matter, but also my having conducted the previous research in my native culture I felt gave the respondents a sense of faith, an acceptance of the validity of that which I was studying, knowing that I was well versed in such customs and practices in my home country. This post-modernist reflexivity can, as long as the researcher is aware of it, function to aid in the research, as Pat Caplan points out "One of reflexivity's basic tenets, which is that of the self, including the cultural baggage which the ethnographer brings to the field, helps shape the ethnographic encounter." (Caplan,

1994: 83).

Ultimately the emphasis on oral history, people's own account and perception of customs hopefully bring the research closer to fulfilling the Kantian ethic that people must be treated as ends in themselves and not merely as means to an end.

## **2.5 Questionnaire**

The composition of the questionnaire was based on background literary research and two preliminary interviews, as well as the feedback obtained from a pilot run amongst students at Kokugakuin University in December 2007. In order to stay true to the tone I wished to keep throughout the questionnaire, I was lucky enough to have the assistance of a native Japanese speaker with a background in folklore, as well as being herself a mother, to read over the questionnaire a number of times so as to get the language both thematically and technically appropriate. In this context, the proper level of politeness becomes of paramount importance. One of the difficulties faced was that a number of the words used involved Chinese characters not often seen outside the academic study of folklore. It was therefore decided, in order to make the questionnaire accessible to all and keep alienation at minimum, to write some of the words in the phonetic alphabet, hiragana.

The questionnaire (Appendix I) was placed online in February 2008, and was open to both genders and all nationalities, with questions determining birthplace as well as habitation so as to infer nationality. It was written in php and run from a Linux apache server with the data stored in a MySQL database on a private webpage, the link to which was shared in a multitude of ways, as enumerated above. All in all, it received 135 responses over a period of 2 months, although, as will be explained below, only a small portion thereof were of extensive use.

The questionnaire was in both Japanese and English, although most participants opted for Japanese. The initial page contained the introduction explaining the scope of the questionnaire, the intended use of the material, and of course reiterating the complete anonymity of the

responses, as well as information regarding the option, should they so wish, of leaving contact information or comments at the end. The page contained contact information for both the researcher and the department, and served as an informed consent for the rest of the questionnaire.

The following page then proceeded to ask for background information, such as place of birth, current place of residence, year of birth and gender, and whether the informant had had children themselves. All but the gender and whether the informant was a parent were optional, although requested, and unfortunately a minor part of the informants opted to not give such details, resulting in possible bias in the statistical information.

The questionnaire comprised 45 questions, with an additional two questions as an option for people who had themselves experienced childbirth. The first page asked questions related to conception, the next four pages focused on the period of pregnancy, one page was on birthing, and four pages addressed the infant and its surroundings. As the participants were thanked for contributing on the last page, there was the added option of leaving contact information for future questions as well as comments.

Reflecting the usual folkloric approach, the questionnaire mostly comprised open-ended questions so as to evoke richer and more explanatory answers, as well as to elicit further material previously unknown to the researcher.

The questionnaire results presented an unanticipated dilemma. For previous research I had relied almost entirely on data obtained through an online questionnaire. At that time it focused on Iceland, but replies came from all over the world, and the response had been overwhelmingly good. The responses abounded, and it was obvious that I had hit an interest nerve, as respondents would often further elucidate their answers, thereby increasing the data obtained (Thorgeirsdottir, 2006). Hence I was slightly taken aback when early data analysis of the current questionnaire responses indicated that in order to obtain the quality of data necessary for the research I would have to reconsider the direction of the research methodology. In spite of clearly asking for answers elucidating their thoughts with



background information, a considerable number of respondents replied with yes/no answers. A considerable number of replies were that of possessing no knowledge, yet when asking about the same or similar topics during the interviews I received considerable information and detailed answers. Hence it draws into doubt the veracity of taking these “no” answers completely at face value, given the extensive knowledge most people expressed in person when asked. Through people I knew had answered, it transpired that they had experienced the length of the questionnaire to be overwhelming, that lack of computer literacy kept many from finishing. Others mentioned discomfort in sharing such information on the computer, and one even printed out the questions and then sent me her handwritten answers. Yet another expressed doubt as to my interest in the subject matter being honest. So taking the words of Bruce Jackson to heart, when he remarks how it would be wonderfully useful if folklorists reported not only their successes but also their failures, this is where early data analysis had me perforce reconsidering the direction of the methodology (Jackson, 1987: 14).

Another issue that I found was that my Japanese correspondents expressed feelings of discomfort in importuning others, in clear contrast to my experience with my previous research, where people had happily shared the questionnaire with a wide range of friends and family.

Setbacks and direction changes aside, considerable material was accumulated through the questionnaire with very interesting variables that would have been hard to come by in interviews, which in turn helped considerably in constructing a framework for the interviews as well as formulating questions from which to work. Jackson likens fieldwork to a car: one may know how to work it, how all the levers work but each journey is filled with the unexpected as “each utilization of technique is a new creative moment, one absolutely specific to itself. ...you must deal with whatever impediment the world puts in your way as you go.” (Jackson, 1987: 6).

## **2.6 Interviews**

The responses from the questionnaire along with information obtained from bibliographical and observational research were then used to construct a set of guiding questions employed to conduct interviews during a return visit to Japan in March 2009. The constant redesign of the study “indicates that he engages in analytic activity most of the time he is in the field” (Becker and Greer, 1960: 270–271).

Those interviewed included both people who had left their contact details on the online questionnaire, thus implying a willingness to be further contacted, as well as a variety of people with whom I had established contact through friends and colleagues. This ultimately resulted in over 27 hours of recorded material.

In contrast to my experience with the questionnaire, the interview format turned out to be very rewarding and to result in in-depth discussions of experiences and perceptions. Questions that in the questionnaire had resulted in only minimal responses turned into long topics of conversation.

Initial hesitation was there, as was to be expected, with the informants often expressing doubt or disbelief as to me “honestly” being interested in the material. Early on during the process I developed a technique that served me well, whereby during the initial introduction and the explanation of my research and purpose, I would, in a conversational manner, give an example of a pregnancy-related item of folk belief from Japan and then describe a comparative occurrence from Icelandic culture. The drawbacks to the technique being that I might be leading my respondents, as well as planting suggestions as to how they might perceive I would want to proceed. However given that in most cases this was the first time we had met and that time was limited, I felt that the boon of them perceiving me as someone who had evidently done her preliminary research, had a background knowledge not only in Japanese culture but also of childbearing from both an academic as well as a personal perspective, far outweighed the disadvantages. Invariably my approach did indeed induce a more relaxed atmosphere as they now knew that my fluency with the language was enough so

as to not cause discomfort, and a friendly, confidence evoking tone had been set.

As was discussed in the ethics section, gender and experience helped considerably with establishing a connection based on common ground. Nevertheless there was never any doubt that I was an outsider, a foreigner. This resulted, I believe, in me enjoying certain elements of Goldstein's "stranger value", the advantage strangers can sometimes have during data gathering as people can be more willing to share private information with a complete outsider than they would with a local person. (Goldstein, 1964: 64) Although perceptions of foreigners in Japan tend to be markedly those of experiencing the "other", with the term for foreigner, *gaijin*, even on occasion bearing negative connotations, and numerous people of foreign origin expressing the feeling of being treated as "alien". My perception when it came to the interviews was that rather than first and foremost a foreigner, my status as a mother played a more significant role. The novelty value of my research also appeared to have an effect, as exemplified by informants mentioning never having talked about certain facets of their pregnancy before. This extended to revealing hitherto undiscussed matters, and on one occasion the daughter who joined us for the interview was taken aback by various tidbits of knowledge regarding, for example her own name, which she had not been aware of before that day.

For the most part the interviews were conducted in Japanese, with only a couple of the informants seeking to speak in English, but even then there was fluctuation between the languages. When a term was used of which I was unsure, I would ask for further elucidation and occasionally I would leave it be, even if I hadn't quite comprehended the term, as rather than further disrupting the interview I relied on assistance to identify the word or concept during the transcribing. Once initial transcription had taken place I had assistance from a native speaker in reading over and correcting the language so as to lessen the probability of mistakes in the choice of Chinese characters. As even the earliest fieldwork methodologies emphasize, precise verbatim transcription is needed to avoid mistakes and false impressions. (Burne, 1914: 17)

The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations based upon the wishes of the informants themselves. This introduced issues associated with the confidentiality of public spaces, noise pollution and interruptions, as well as answers being influenced by other people present. The confidentiality issue seemed to be a minor consideration, as the informants were willing to discuss very private matters in public coffee houses and restaurants, yet extremely hesitant about inviting into their homes. I had previously observed this perception of private space within public spaces in Japan. Although disrupting of other people's peace, such as talking on mobile telephones in trains is severely discouraged<sup>9</sup>, one finds that the rules of propriety, of what is acceptable behaviour in public, are stretched considerably when it comes, for instance, to *hanami* (blossom viewing). During the festival people lay out traditional blue tarp mats under the cherry blossoms and that mat then comes to be treated as private space, to be respected by, for instance, not wearing ones shoes. Upon these mats people will have large gatherings, singing parties or engage in affectionate hugging, all on the premise of being in a private sphere although very visibly public.

There were other considerations when it came to the interviews. It was not always possible to talk to informants alone. Occasionally there were children who, although providing ways of initiating certain conversation topics, could prove disruptive when it came to eliciting long responses. On one occasion I interviewed three elderly ladies together, which meant that the ground that I could cover was considerably lessened, but at the same time resulted in more in-depth material as the ladies would throw the topic under discussion back and forth, discussing amongst themselves variations and differing perceptions. One interview was unfortunately largely ruined as background wind noise drowned out the conversation, leaving me only with snippets of conversation as well as field notes.

On the whole the interviewing process went exceedingly well with the material gathered therein constituting the major part of the research presented. Below is a table of the respondents, organized in chronological order following the time of interview, giving an idea

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<sup>9</sup> As early as 1990 announcements were being made on trains asking passengers to refrain from using their mobile phones while at their seats (Matsuda, 2004: 24).

of the variety in ages as well as places of residence and origin. Of the respondents 10 had not yet borne children whilst 21 had.

## 2.7 Overview of participants

<b>Figure 1: Table of Participants</b>				
	<b>Age</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Place of birth</b>	<b>Current residence</b>
PE 1	58	3	Nishime (Akita ken)	Honjo City (Akita ken)
PE 2	33	0	Aichi (Nagoya)	Tokyo
PE 3	41	0	Kanagawa	Toshima-ku, Tokyo
PE 4	65	2	Akita ken	Tokyo
PE 5	26	0	Odawara (Kanagawa)	Suginami-ku, Tokyo
PE 6	27	0	Fukuoka	Kanagawa
PE 7	68	2	Tokyo	Tokyo
PE 8	65	3	Tokyo	Tokyo
PE 9	63	2	Hokkaido	Tokyo
PE 10	36	1	Gunma	Tokyo
PE 11	62	2	Toyama	Tokyo
PE 12	32	1	Osaka	Kanagawa
PE 13	47	3	Tokyo	Tokyo
PE 14	42	2	Hokkaido	Tokyo
PE 15	22	0	Maebashi (Gunma)	Tokyo
PE 16	29	1	Fukushima ken	Tokyo
PE 17	50	2	Tokyo	Tokyo
PE 18	31	0	Yamanashi	Tokyo
PE 19	48	2	Tochigi ken	Tokyo
PE 20	52	2	Gifu	Chiba
PE 21	85	2	Akita ken	Akita ken
PE 22	62	2	Yamagata ken	Akita ken
PE 23	68	3	Akita ken	Akita ken
PE 24	45	1	Akita ken	Akita ken
PE 25	70	2	Noshiro city (Akita ken)	Honjo city (Akita ken)
PE 26	33	3	Akita ken	Nishime (Akita ken)
PE 27	33	0	Akita ken	Akita ken
PE 28	33	0	Honjo city (Akita ken)	Akita city (Akita ken)
PE 29	33	0	Wakayama	Tokyo
PE30	30	2	Tokyo	Akita
PE31	22	0	Tokyo	Tokyo

## 2.8 Observations

The visitor should enquire for and take advantage of all opportunities of witnessing such things, so as to be able to speak from personal knowledge. In this way a considerable body of notes on custom and legend may be got together, and acquaintances formed which may pave the way for more. (Burne, 1914: 9).

Burns' directive, although from almost a century ago, still stands as an important tenet of folklore fieldwork, as analysis is difficult without contextual information. Thus I avidly collected contextual data and field notes. This was doubly important in my case as rarely did I have the chance to observe my interview informants themselves observing the rituals or traditions of which we had spoken, making it hard to evaluate the correlation between what was expressed and then what was actually performed. The main contextual data I could accrue from my interviewees were photographs of them observing rituals, as well as to view (and photograph with permission) mementos and talismans. The pride with which these were displayed and the care shown in their careful conservation spoke volumes, as did the fact that these were only displayed to me on the occasions where a particularly good rapport had been established.

In addition to this I also visited numerous shrines and temples, both on important ritual days—such as when the Day of the Dog fell upon an auspicious day, as shall be discussed in detail in the Section on *inu no hi*—as well as on calmer days where I had the opportunity to speak to some of the monks and priests/priestesses. This documentation is largely in the form of field notes and a multitude of photographs. On three occasions I was able to attend fertility festivals, where I copiously documented the proceedings with photographs as well as written notes, and managed to speak to a few of the participants. Those informal interviews elicited information that tended to place previous knowledge in a different perspective, and thus advance the research, although the ethics of questioning inebriated shrine carriers might well be considered dubious.

The internet provides another resource for observation and I monitored chat rooms online,

both on the social site Mixi<sup>10</sup> as well as on Web sites aimed at pregnant women and those who had recently borne a child. There was an obvious tendency, contrary to other findings within the research, within these groups to express exaggerations and a predilection for absolutes. Consequently the material collected there served mostly to discover alternative threads to follow, as well as garnering further elucidations upon specific items.

On the whole, what these observations brought to light though were the rich variety in customs and rituals and how they varied in their expression, as well indicating under what circumstances the rules expressed could be broken, and how.

## **2.9 Analysis**

As was discussed at the start of this chapter, folklore research has from the very start employed a number of different methods in its collection of folklore, and although the theoretical changes and approaches to methodologies have been considerable, this plurality remains to this day a core characteristic in the folklore research paradigm. The present research engaged a number of differing methods in order to glean an emergent pattern throughout the material obtained. During the process, the emphasis placed on each method within the research framework was adjusted, as whilst developing familiarity with the accumulating dataset it became obvious that such a shift would become a necessity in order to obtain the data needed. This type of redesign of the study midway is neither uncommon nor perceived by scholars as detrimental, but rather that, as Howard Becker and Blanche Greer have argued, it “indicates that he (the researcher) engages in analytic activity most of the time he is in the field” (Becker and Greer, 1960: 270–271).

Although every attempt was made to preserve nuances and linguistic integrity, the very fact that the interviews were conducted partially in a second language introduced the potential for misunderstandings. Consideration has to be given to the fact that linguistic analysis is

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<sup>10</sup> A social networking site wherein people post diary entries, photographs as well as share posts within interest groups [www.mixi.co.jp](http://www.mixi.co.jp)

likely to be tainted by factors such as informants simplifying their language for the researchers benefit, as well as the researcher on occasion possibly not picking up on nuances at the time of the interview, thereby losing the chance to ask for further elucidation. A native speaker assisted by reading over and correcting the choice of Chinese characters throughout the transcripts, thus diminishing danger of mis-reading of the texts involved, and hopefully diminishing linguistic subjectivity.

Textual analysis was done utilising NVivo, which helped in both identifying recurrence and discerning patterns. Looking for formulaic phrases led to breakthroughs in inference and data analysis, which were then utilised in contextual analysis, as the text in itself is insufficient. As Dan Ben-Amos has pointed out, the concept of folklore is taken to “its logical conclusions, insisting that any valid interpretation consider the entire cultural, social, and situational context. The meaning of a text is its meaning in context.” (Ben-Amos 1993: 210) The emphasis on context assisting in understanding and interpreting the material gathered “contextual analysis does not explain folklore; it interprets it, seeking meanings rather than causes” (Honko, 1986).





### **Chapter 3: Japanese Socio-Cultural environment**

Before presenting and analysing the data collected a certain framework must first be presented. There is not the space or a great enough need to go in depth into the Japanese societal background in the current thesis. However two elements within Japanese culture must perforce be touched upon as they relate directly to the current research. Those two subjects would be the religio-social environment as well as the current societal status of women within Japanese society, both of which influence the data and will be frequently referenced throughout.

Japanese history stretches far back and considerable continuity is to be found within certain cultural aspects, often unfortunately leading to generalisations as to how things ‘were’ in contrast to how they currently ‘are’. Certain elements do stay true, such as the Japanese perception of dirt and cleanliness. In his description of Japanese culture, the Jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) went so far as to describe the people he met thus ‘all are white, courteous and highly civilized, so much so that they surpass all the other races of the world’. After years of adapting, learning the language and the appropriate levels of formality there was but one element Valigniano found highly objectionable, to the point of simply not being able to adjust, and that was the reprehensible custom of taking daily baths (Quoted in Schirokauer, Lurie & Gay, 2006: 134). This continued emphasis on cleanliness is however closely related to cultural and religious ideas of ritual pollution as well as the concepts of ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, that which belongs and that which doesn't. The general nature even today as to the importance of cleanliness can be clearly seen through the common practice of taking cars in to be cleaned in a purification ritual at both Shinto shrines and Bhuddist temples so as to be, as Ohnuki-Tierney phrases it, ‘not only be physically cleaned, but culturally purified as well’ (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1989: 61).

Large migration from countryside to cities in the last few decades, along with a considerable economic downturn, have had considerable affect upon Japanese culture.

Although, being a lengthy island there also is hardly such a thing as one unified culture, as variants are considerable and societal differences exist between northern and southern Japan. The dying down and then consequent resurgence of traditions is also important to note, as at times traditions leapt over a generation, leaving at times regret and remorse.

Ella Wiswell recounts from her research in Suye Village in the 1930s, that following an in-depth conversation, where whilst at the beginning of the conversation she was implicitly told there was no contraception to be had, because having children was encouraged, she was indeed told of both quinine douches used by professionals and then *sekku* a type of condom apparently owned by one couple in the village. (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 88).

### ***3.1 Women in modern day Japan***

‘Once a woman gets married and has children she gives up any dreams of becoming a professor or a professional’<sup>11</sup> one of my respondents told me during our interview. At 36 she had been a career-track professional in one of the larger banks in Tokyo, with an international background and being fully fluent in English she had managed to rise relatively high within the company. Upon starting to date one of her co-workers, she accepted without argument when her immediate supervisor advised her that she should resign before being undoubtedly made to resign once the information became common knowledge. When I asked her whether the same didn’t apply for men she said the same rules applied but that it was ‘always’ the woman who resigned. This gives a certain insight into the work environment Japanese women face. The expectation has been that rather than choose a career track, women would choose a non-career track, working upon finding a spouse, at which time they would leave the workforce in order to raise the children and then perhaps return at a later date for a part-time position. This results in the M shaped curve so often described by social theorists showing directly the dip in the workforce experienced when those women disappear from the labour

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<sup>11</sup> (PE10) A 36-year-old in Tokyo.

market (Sugimoto, 2007: 155). The current government is attempting to work towards lessening this gap.

This problem is further exacerbated by the continually declining birthrate, leading to a disproportionate number of older people. The fertility decline has been continual since the 1950s with a slight peak in 1973. However, a major cause for shock was in 1989 when the decline surpassed that of the *hinoeuma*, year of the fire horse, (which will be fully explained in Section 3.2.1.) when couples had deliberately shied away from having children (Hirao, 2007: 53).

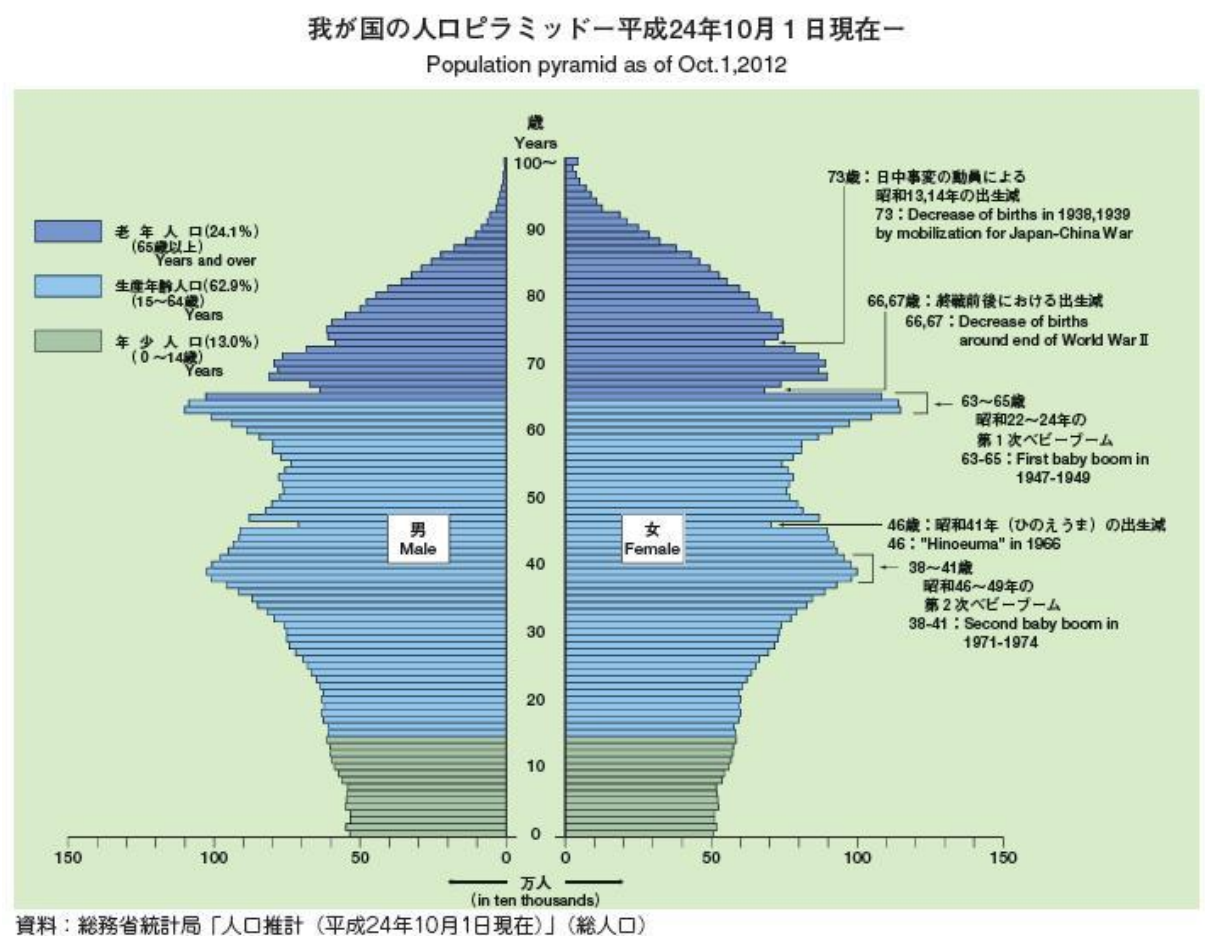


Figure 2: Population Pyramid as of October 2012<sup>12</sup>

Consequently a number of measures were taken by the government, in particular through the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act (1991) and the Basic Law for Gender-Equal

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hw/vs01.html>

Society (1999). However they failed to recognize the fundamental difficulty in the inconsistent roles demanded of women. Young women are more frequently deciding against marriage, seeing as the expectation is for them then to leave the workplace. Even in the light of recent changes leading to a substantial narrowing of wage gap between the sexes, this still only applies to women who choose the career track,

According to data collected for the current #SOWM Report, Japan currently ranks 32nd in 'the best place to be a mother' in the world, whilst Iceland ranks 4th and the UK ranks 26th. The noteworthy factor is that in cases of maternal deaths, infant mortality, education opportunity and gross income, Japan scores alongside Sweden as one of the highest countries, offering great benefits to mothers. However the great difference lies in female participation in national politics. In Sweden, women hold 45% of seats in the national government, 23% in the UK and 40% in Iceland, in sharp contrast to Japanese women who possess less than 11% of seats.<sup>13</sup>

Upon observing a fellow student, a young woman of 25, deciding to drop out of her masters studies, she informed me that she feared that if she saw the course though she would have reached an age whereupon she would no longer be hired by a good firm, a concern also expressed by a resposdee of Millie Creighton when she exclaimed that with a four-year degree no one would hire her (Creighton, 1996: 198). Entering a career track is taking the chance of never marrying. Of all the women in managerial positions Creighton met during her research, not one had been married (Creighton, 1996: 211).

A frequently used phrase encapsulates the ill-navigable situation young Japanese women find themselves in, namely *kurisumasu keeki* or 'Christmas Cake' when referring to women's marriage age: unwanted or premature 20th, rising in popularity until December 24th or 25th, whereupon demand is at its peak, after which interest dwindles until by the 31st no one cares for them. The age preferable for marriage is referred to as *tekireiki*.

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<sup>13</sup> Report available upon registering <http://www.savethechildren.org>

For men there is slightly more latitude (26–30), but the result is similar. The situation is slightly different for men, or as Applbaum says ‘A man who does not marry by about 30 or so is thought untrustworthy by colleagues and employers, who believe that such men have not been conditioned to learn the fundamental principles of co-operation and responsibility’ (Applbaum, 1995: 39). The ageism is also evident when it comes to the age bracket perceived to be appropriate for having children. After having had difficulty conceiving (PE24) sought assistance from a fertility clinic, which soon fortuitously proved fruitful. However when attempting a second child she was left in shock: the doctor more or less threw her out of the office, exclaiming angrily that it was impossible at her age. She was 40 at the time. She was further informed that unless she quit her job then they would be unwilling to help her.

It is not only age that limits a woman's options. A young woman born 1975 (PE28) was in a happy relationship with a young man from a nearby village, but constantly being pressed by her father to break it up. The reason behind this pressure was that the young man was the oldest son of an established house in a farming environment, and had they got married it would have been expected that she move in with her parents-in-law and take on a submissive role within the household. This happened in 1999 in northern rural Akita and is still an issue within the rural farming communities.

Expectations towards the mother's social role are considerable. Japanese upbringing focuses on *Skinship* and example. Skinship is the importance of spending as much time as possible in close contact with the child, consequently sleeping and bathing together. Making use of a babysitter, even for one evening is frowned upon as it is perceived as the mother neglecting her child, her duties. The ideology of the *Ryōsai kenbo*, ‘good wife, wise mother’ reverberates through society. A mother is supposed to instill discipline in her child by exhibiting it herself (Allison, 1996: 139), teaching by leading, not berating. This understandably takes considerable time and dedication.

Playschools, primary schools and after-school clubs, for instance, all demand that the child have bags for things such as shoes, swim wear and other such items, washing cloths and

towels, and for all of these the mother receives precise instructions as to size, form and how and where it should be marked. This works theoretically to increase the uniformity of the children whilst at school, yet children whose mother's store-bought these items get noticed and sometimes picked upon, placing further pressure on the mother to spend nights sewing these items.<sup>14</sup> (Allison, 1996: 130).

Even when men wish to further participate in the home life, taking on duties and part of the chores, the strict unwritten rules of overtime within a Japanese firm make that night impossible. There is the expectation that if one person higher ranking than you is still working then others do not leave, as it will be noticed if you leave. This makes picking children up from school or planning ahead very difficult.

Once the mother-to-be becomes officially pregnant, very often around the fifth month as shall be discussed in chapter 5.2.1., she steps visibly into the role. The change of roles, from a young woman to a mother, is noticeable and visible. I was somewhat taken aback when, upon becoming pregnant, PE27 a 33-year-old, after having struck up a friendship subsequent to the interview contacted me and asked if my daughter would like some clothes. When I queried this she informed me that as she was now becoming a mother it would be 'inappropriate' for her to continue dressing in this clothing. When I then met her a year later she had cut her long hair to a prim shoulder length, and instead of her usual bright colours she now wore loose clothing in pastel colours and often flower decorated. Japan has a strong uniform culture and it is quite common to see people dress worlds apart dependent on their role at the time, yet the abject change in clothing struck me as excessive. She pointed out to me that this was the appropriate thing to do and that it was important for the children not to be ashamed of their parents.

Japan currently suffers from a severe lack of children. However, young women, having

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<sup>14</sup> At one point during my research period I was called in to my daughter's afterschool club in the middle of the day. Fearing something had happened I hurried home and to the school whereupon I received a lecture in the inadequacies of my daughter's bags, all bought precisely to size, as none were hand sewn. Later a mother of my daughter's friend saw pity upon her and sewed her bag to match her daughters.

had the chance to explore, travel, and have their own wages, are much less likely to be willing to come back and adhere to the strict protocols, the lack of manoeuvrability and knowing that if they have children, despite all legislation, they will most likely end up in a lowly, temporary position.

Young women have to decide on whether they want financial independence, either through a career track or part-time jobs, and then whether they wish to have families, in which case ageism will in all likelihood work against them obtaining a long-term education. What struck the researcher was that in many cases it was the women with the higher level of education who faced the most pressure and perceived themselves as having very few options.

### ***3.2 Religious environment***

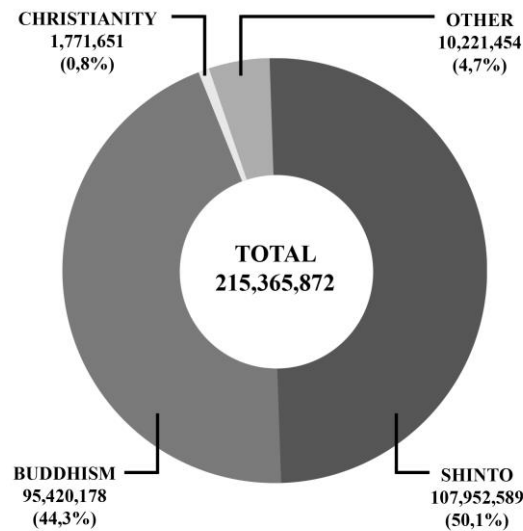
Japan is a country of remarkable syncretisms: Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism have historically coexisted, sharing the various duties without people needing to choose one over the other.

Traditional homes tend to have both a Buddhist altar and a Shinto shrine or shelf. Only once did I come across a family where the father declared proudly that they were fully Shinto, possessing a grand Shinto shrine in the living room. However, later in the evening as I happen to go into the grandmother's bedroom I was met there by a full Buddhist altar. Such is the perception towards religion in Japan, most people practice what is near and convenient, and even those who are absolutist have incredibly high tolerance and acceptance of others.

However most people don't differentiate thus according to the data from the Religious Yearbook (an annual yearbook indicating the membership levels of religious organizations in Japan, published by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs), there were 95.4 million (44.3%) Buddhists and 107.9 million (50.1%) Shintoists in 2001 (Kreiner, Mohwald, & Olsghleger, 2004: 418; Reader, 1991b: 6). The impressive numbers would indicate that half of the Japanese people are Shinto adherents and roughly the other half are Buddhists. However, a problem arose when all the numbers were added up and it turned out that the



outcome was 215,3 million believers, hugely exceeding the actual population of Japan which was 126,7 million in 2001. This paradox, the number of believers accounting for 1,7 times the size of the population arises from the situation where practically every Japanese person has two religions. (Kreiner *et al*, 2004: 418)



**Figure 3: Percentages of religious affiliation**

Traditionally Buddhism places stress on the sorrows and pain one encounters in this lifetime, teaching rejection of fleeting pleasures and the temptations of this world. In Japanese society it deals with death and decay and is consequently forgotten about until such time when it is needed. In contrast Shinto focuses its attention on the joys of this world and the connection between humans and nature, while illness and death are viewed as the source of pollution. Despite these differences or perhaps due to them, the two major religions coexisted peacefully for most of the Japanese history after the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Reader, 1991b: 25). To further illustrate this point, almost every Buddhist temple in Japan has a Shinto *torii* gate (a gateway to a Shinto shrine) at its entrance and is thus guarded by the *kami* (gods or divine beings in Shinto religion) (Perez, 2002, p. 47). Up until the Meiji restoration it was common for Shrines and temples to inhabit the same grounds. The forced division of religion saw a number of situations where one or the other then merely moved across the road, still staying though in close proximity.

With 94% of the funerals conducted with Buddhist rites Ian Reader describes the reality for many Japanese people as “born Shinto, die Buddhist.” (Reader, 1991b:7) As was discussed in the chapter on blood pollution in the literature review, there is a strong element of pollution connected with both menses and childbearing (Norbeck,1952). However how much of that still applies? Lafcadio Hearn wrote in 1894 “Shinto, as the religion of purity and purification, has a Deuteronomy of quite an extensive kind. During certain periods women must not even pray before the *miya*, much less make offerings or touch the sacred vessels, or kindle the lights of the Kami.” (Hearn, 1894: 401).

One respondent, a 31-year-old university educated nurse was completely taken aback upon us discussing ritual pollution. She had never come across it before and had previously associated any such thoughts with Nepal never once with her own culture. She was however very grateful about having learnt this and kept coming back to it throughout (PE18).

As for pollution during menses, *I was told not to go to the shrine during menses* 42 year old responded (PE14). *When you are in a state of kegare you're not supposed to pass under the torii* (Shinto shrine gate). *So once a month women are not supposed to pass under the torii.* So when was this? *At the time of grandmother or great grandmother. The same was at the time of mourning. This is even now and it's not a personal thing, it's also at festivals, you know festivals? Yes. Well when the mikoshi (portable shrine) is out and being thrown around, it can get dangerous and if there is kegare (pollution) this can affect the mikoshi and then it could fall* (PE20). As the mikoshi is believed to carry the local deity around town, dropping it because of pollution would be catastrophic. *It used to be that the idea of pollution was very strong around here. Craftsmen and fishermen would definitely not enter into a room where birth was taking place. But the culture has changed* (PE23). A 45 year old in Akita was adamant that all ideas of pollution are no longer. (PE24).

A 26-year-old who recognized menstrual pollution however added *It is the old way of thinking, I don't worry about it.* (PE05). She then added that *When I was a child I had to be aware of whether days were auspicious or inauspicious, so I was not allowed to start using*

*new clothes or start new ventures on inauspicious days. I didn't really worry about it, and today I don't care because I don't have a calendar that marks it.* (PE05). It is of note though that university issued diaries contained all the information as to auspicious or inauspicious days. Lastly, respondent (PE21) aged 85 informed me that Akita had always been much more of a Buddhist area rather than Shinto. A 65-year-old supported this by claiming that people in Akita didn't much go to shrines (PE22). This clearly shows how impossible it is to generalize for Japan.

### **3.2.1 Calamitous years**

It is not only days that tend to be calamitous, but also superstitious belief exists nigh everywhere, albeit in different guises, and depending on its societal context, being sometimes invisible to the eye of a visitor. Calendar-based belief in the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of certain days and years persist, although frowned upon in school textbooks.

Probably the two most vivid examples of how alive superstitious belief is or was in Japanese culture would be the example of the *Hinoeuma* and *Yakudoshi*. As for *Hinoeuma*, it emerged when there was a sudden 25% drop in 1966 in the birthrate of female children in the year of the fire horse. Since antiquity there has in Japan been the belief that a person's personality trait is somewhat dependent upon the year in which they are born (Lee and Paik, 2006). However this belief is very precise and is based on the sexagenary cycle, originating in the Chinese zodiac, comprising a rotating cycle of 12 animal signs together with 10 stems that form 60 different units. Each unit represents a year in the calendar, and the 60-year cycle is known as the sexagenary cycle. Once having traversed a whole circle and thus reached the age of 61, that person is then considered to having returned to being a child and is clad in red, the colour of infants.<sup>15</sup> Not only do the animals represent a year in a twelve-year cycle, but also a day in a twelve-day cycle, as well as a two-hour period in each day, the importance of which to the current research will be made obvious in the following chapter on pregnancy.

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<sup>15</sup> Still practised, although more of a family ritual and jocular in nature.

For a Japanese girl to be born in the 43rd year of the cycle, the year of the Fire Horse, *Hinoeuma* [丙午], is considered especially ominous. The year is renowned for disasters, and the belief that a woman born that year is considered to be extremely headstrong and quite likely to kill herself or her husband is still strong (Itabashi, 2007: 31; Lee and Paik, 2006: 269; Hardacre, 1997: 68; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 71).

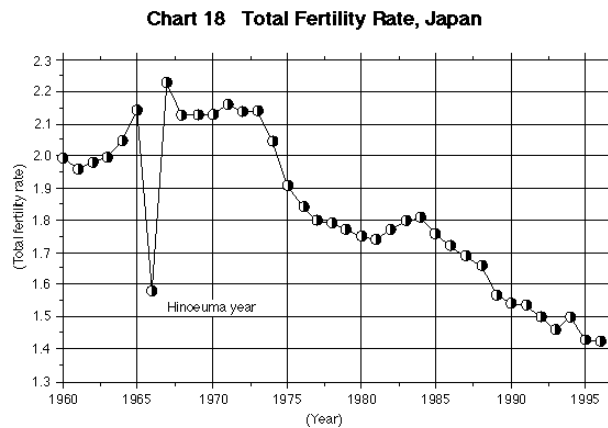
PE01, a 58-year-old respondent in Akita, mentioned that even today a matchmaker will blatantly refuse to take on the task of finding a match for a lady born in *hinoeuma*, using the term for disgusting or unpleasant<sup>16</sup>, a view echoed by Appelbaum in her discussion on *miai* or arranged marriages; ‘The last such year was 1966, and women born in that year are considered bad luck to marry’. When PE01 was probed why, the answer was that the woman would end up murdering her husband, a statement accompanied by a descriptive knife stabbing movement. The grand majority of respondents to the questionnaire were aware of the ill fortune of *hinoeuma*, varying their answers from claiming that a female born that year would be strong willed, too intelligent or a tomboy.

Several stated that, in general, people avoid giving birth in that year and, interestingly enough, statistics were cited to support the statement as in the cases of QU19, QU36, QU75 and QU41, who said “statistics show that birthrates go down this year, so people definitely believe it”.

The last such year was 1966, in which crude birth rate showed 13.7 live births per 1000 population, as compared with 18.6 in 1965 and 19.4 in 1967 (Azumi, 1968: 46–48). It is also obvious in a table published by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ya*, short for *yada*



**Figure 4: Fertility Rate in Hinoeuma**

The effect of Folk belief on birth rate is obvious, as shown by the very marked fall in births in 1966, the last *hinoeuma* year.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, obtained online 07.02.2010

Takenaka reports similar incidence in 1906, in the beginning of the previous cycle: female births numbered 668,140, compared with 716,822 in 1905 and 798,682 in 1907. Comparison of female births in December and January of these three years indicates the effort to juggle birth rates: 71,511 in December 1905; 66,730 in January 1906; 55,182 in December 1906; and 95,763 in January 1907 (Takenaka, 1977: 187). Ohnuki-Tierney claims ‘If at all possible, the Japanese avoid registering female births during this year by falsifying birth dates, by restricting female births by abortion and by other means’ (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 71). Kaku, in researching the possibility of infanticide during this year, was told by doctors he queried that there might have been “negligence in intensive efforts to keep weak newborn babies alive” when inquiring about *mabiki* or infanticide (Kaku, 1975b: 393).

As for the origins of this belief, Kaku as well as Lee and Paik trace the possible origins back to ‘a coincidence between the year of the Fire Horse and disastrous famines in Japanese history (1786 and 1846)’ as well as the ‘famous tale of Yaoya-Oshichi (Grocer’s daughter), a woman born in a Fire Horse year, who, as the story goes, burned down her house due to her love of a young priest, a tale often depicted in Kabuki plays and Odori dances’ (Lee and Paik, 2006: 270; Kaku, 1975a: 114). Whatever the reason, there has historically been an obvious drop in female births in the year of the fire horse (Hardacre, 1997: 68). As the combination

only occurs every 60 years, only research conducted in or after the year 2026 will tell if the recurrent sentiment expressed in this research will still be strong enough to manifest.

The *hinoeuma* year was not the only auspicious or inauspicious year. Whilst in China the year of the dragon is considered particularly auspicious for childbearing<sup>17</sup>, Miyata found the Year of the Dragon prone to calamities in Japanese culture (Miyata, 1975: 168–173; Goodkind, 1991: 663).

*Yakudoshi* [厄年] in comparison, is the Japanese belief that at certain times in a person's life, certain years, are calamitous and thus no grand ventures should be undertaken as they are bound to fail. These years differ for males and females, generally thought to be the 25<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> years of a man's life, whereas women should be aware and careful during their 19<sup>th</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> year. The 42<sup>nd</sup> year for men and the 33<sup>rd</sup> for women are considered to be particularly bad, and years of great calamities. There are numerous regional and historical variations, but the above ages seem to have become an acknowledged standard (Norbeck, 1955; Yanagita, 1951: 629–630). The idea of *yakudoshi* is still very much alive, as exemplified by the numerous shrines and temples offering ritual cleansing, as well as the popularity of the 2006 Japanese television drama, *Hanayome wa Yakudoshi*!<sup>18</sup>, which follows the life of a female journalist whose life suddenly becomes riddled with one calamity after another once she reaches her 33<sup>rd</sup> year.

A common sentiment is expressed by PE27, a 33-year-old respondent in Akita, who expressed disbelief in *yakudoshi*, proclaiming that she'd never believed in such nonsense, but upon turning 33 found her health suddenly deteriorating, and upon the insistence of her family attended cleansing ceremonies at a shrine, as she said “just in case”.

There are number of ceremonies and rituals undertaken with the aim of dispelling this misfortune, including partaking in festivals such as the *Hōnen Matsuri* (festival) which will

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<sup>17</sup> Tang, Sisi. Hong Kong braces for influx of “Dragon Babies”.  
[www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/23/us-hongkong-dragonbabies-idUSTRE80M1RF20120123](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/23/us-hongkong-dragonbabies-idUSTRE80M1RF20120123)”

<sup>18</sup> 花嫁は厄年ッ！ Broadcast on TBS from 2006-07-06 to 2006-09-21

be described in detail below, wherein the author was informed that one of the main reveller groups consisted almost entirely of 42-year-old men, all adorned by a carved wooden phallus on a string around their neck, which in the course of inviting others to touch said member, disperse their own ill fortune by granting others fertility.

平成21年の厄年(数え年)

	前厄	本厄	後厄
男	24才 昭和61年生 とら	25才 昭和60年生 うし	26才 昭和59年生 ね(ねずみ)
の	41才 昭和44年生 とり	42才 昭和43年生 さる	43才 昭和42年生 ひつじ
厄	60才 昭和25年生 とら	61才 昭和24年生 うし	62才 昭和23年生 ね(ねずみ)
年			
女	18才 平成4年生 さる	19才 平成3年生 ひつじ	20才 平成2年生 うま
の	32才 昭和53年生 うま	33才 昭和52年生 み(へび)	34才 昭和51年生 たつ
厄	36才 昭和49年生 とら	37才 昭和48年生 うし	38才 昭和47年生 ね(ねずみ)
年			

※数え年とは、新年を迎えた翌日から数える年。例年通りなら、前厄は本厄の前年、本厄は後厄の前年、後厄は本厄の前年。ただし、例年通りでない場合は、前厄は本厄の前年、本厄は後厄の前年、後厄は本厄の前年。

Figure 5: A traditional *Yakudoshi* schema displayed at Shrines and Temples



Figure 6: Men in their *yakudoshi* dispelling the *kegare* by participating in a festival

It is, however, the children born to people during their *yakudoshi* that are of interest for the purpose of this study. During his research in 1955, Norbeck found that in certain communities a male child born to a man in his 42<sup>nd</sup> year or a female child born to a woman in her 33<sup>rd</sup> year were considered to be in danger, being referred to by such names as *yakugo*, yaku child, or *onigo*, devil child, and twins in particular, especially if of the opposite sex to the parent suffering *yakudoshi*, were considered particularly ill fated, leading to a complicated manoeuvre in which the child is cast away ritually (Norbeck, 1955: 112). This did not seem to be the case in the current study. There were far more instances where people expressed the somewhat opposite idea, namely that a woman bearing a child during her *yakudoshi* would be beneficial, as in doing so she flushes away her ill luck. This was without exception accompanied by a very descriptive hand movement, both hands sweeping down the body and away in a swift motion. This idea that the 'ill luck' is something intangible yet combatable

leads us on to the deities to whom a person can call for assistance, and the ill luck can easily be translated into pollution.





## Chapter 4: Conception

### 4.1 *The first brush with liminality*

Before we can turn our attention to pregnancy we must perforce first dwell upon conception, that magical point where a new life begins. The first segment of a rite of passage involves the element of separation and the question posed in this chapter will be whether that separation begins as early as the time of conception, when supernatural elements start to affect the life of the woman.

As was discussed in the introduction, children were believed to belong to the gods up until the age of seven. They were perceived as having a closer connection to the *kami* and, were they to die, to return to the world of the *kami* to be reborn (Iijima, 1987: 41; Yanagita, 1935: 155). Thus as we shall see in the section on the role of deities there were a number of deities who were known for their tendency to help and look after children, as well as to assist with conception.

The Japanese religious and spiritual environment is, as previously discussed, in many ways characterized by its extremely fluid and synergistic stance towards other religions and the interactions therein. The lack of friction makes it in many ways difficult for the outsider to comprehend the interlacing elements of the belief systems, wherein they not only share traditions but deities also travel the pass between Buddhism and Shintoism frequently and seemingly unhesitatingly. Hence the task of scholars is not without its complications, in their attempt to define the fine line between folk belief and deities belonging to a religion, temple or shrine specifically aimed at fertility. As Ohnuki-Tierney notes, 'Japanese religions are magical in nature, although they are highly institutionalized, with an elaborate body of theology' (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 144), Japanese religion is a mixture of folk belief and traditional religious elements.

Therefore, in order to gain insight into the magico-religious element of conception and pregnancy we must be aware of the primary child-granting deities, their origin and variations.

These deities also oftentimes double as deities granting easy delivery as well as protection for children.

There are a myriad of traditional ways to help with conception in Japanese society, as shown when conducting an online search for terms such as *kodakara* [子宝] ‘the treasure that is children’; *koyasu* [子安] ‘safe, easy childbirth’; or *kosodate* [子育て] ‘raising children’—hundreds of links to shrines, temples, maternity pages, confectioners and tourist shops will turn up. Certain enshrined deities and temples are said to possess the power of granting children, there are talismans to be bought, hot springs to be visited, phallic cakes said to be handed down from the gods, and festivals to attend, to name but a few.

The overwhelming sense of commercialization, however, induces doubts as to whether these are actually something Japanese women would subscribe to.

In the course of the interviews the questions pertaining to conception were generally right at the beginning of each interview and the informants still wary and sceptical as to how to approach the material as well as the interview. There was also an added apprehension towards this foreign scholar asking strange questions about subjects often received mockingly. Hence the first few question often got lost amidst trying to get the interviewee to feel at ease and in proving the author’s earnest interest, often times by the sharing of information or experience. Most had very little to say about fertility unless they themselves had experienced difficulty in conceiving, and in Akita, in particular, there were repeated observations as to not having needed any such assistance, or not having had any difficulty conceiving, indicating an obvious matter of pride and minor contempt towards those who seek out such methods. As PE21, an 85-year-old Akita respondent, phrased it “‘religious’ people go to shrines to pray for a child, but the normal people don’t”.

The answers to the first part of the questionnaire were predominantly medical in nature, with most of the respondents giving answers consistent with modern medical knowledge, i.e. the time in a woman’s biological cycle, as well as assisting factors such as vitamins and fertility treatments. Oft-repeated were to take time out for a romantic meal, perhaps with

some wine, as well as pointing out that having intercourse was the best way to get pregnant.

One other issue that frequently arose was the confusing of what induced fertility with rituals or traditions partaken in during pregnancy.

Ohnuki-Tierney has argued that pregnancy in Japanese society is often perceived as an illness, a state of disequilibrium, and thus vulnerability for both mother and child (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 187). Rather than starting off with the presumption of illness, the focus will be on inequilibrium, anything indicative of the woman leaving the sphere of normalcy, through looking at the various items of folklore pertaining to conception in Japanese society and elements thereof.

## ***4.2 Fertility rites and the study of folklore***

The mere mention of fertility, even more so fertility rites, in the context of folklore research immediately induces in the folklorist a wary and sceptical apprehension, due to emblematic overtones of a research past from which the school of folklore has spent great energies distancing itself. The Frazerian focus on theory of origins nevertheless remains part of how many perceive the study of folklore. The search for ancient and absolute origins of all rites and rituals has resulted often in hazy and tenuous links between modern merrymaking and ancient fertility cults as exemplified in the words of Jaqueline Simpson when speaking of modern perception of current folklore research in Britain 'as obsessed with fertility rites and secret witch-cults, or with starry-eyed idealizations of 'Merrie England'' (Simpson, 1989: 4). The automatic assumption is that anything magical or superstitious indicates 'primitive', a word that sends shivers down any folklorist spine.

The nineteenth century saw a great change in how European scholars studied the culture and religions of other nations; evolutionary anthropology blossomed and there arose the notion of ritual as a 'universal category of human experience' (Bell: 1992: 14), implying that all of humanity followed a uniform path from savagery to enlightenment and thus all cultures

had at some point held the same beliefs whilst at the same stage of the evolutionary ladder. Folklore was hence believed to be mere remnants of older beliefs, survivals and Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), surmised that all myths and folklore had at one point originated in ancient fertility rituals now reduced to ‘vestigial harvest customs’ (Dorson, 1972: 38). Frazer’s magnum opus was the *Golden Bough*, where in 12 volumes of folk customs and traditions collected via correspondence and literature, he propounded that almost the entire collection had at some point developed from ancient fertility rites; an all encompassing theory no longer *de rigueur* (Dorson, 1963: 93). Frazer was writing at a time of social Darwinism, when magic was associated with that which was primitive, and religious institutions were perceived as being closer to the more ‘civilized’ societies.

Despite the negative connotations within the academic discipline from a historical perspective, fertility rites are a fact of human society, albeit in a variety of forms, with some less conspicuous than others. As a consequence they deserve to be studied, avoiding, however, any grand theorizing but instead focusing on the individual within society, as well as on the magico-religious elements surrounding conception.

### **4.3 Role of deities in conception and fertility**

The conception of a child is seldom perceived as mundane, and a healthy newborn is in many cultures referred to as a gift, something that one finds is reflected in the Japanese vocabulary, as Nakayama found during her research on the concepts of *Sazu-karu* and *Tsuku-Ru*, the former meaning to receive, indicating that the child is a gift (from the gods), and the latter meaning to make. She found that although some women referred to having made the child, the child itself was always perceived as a gift (Nakayama, 1996). The child being a gift from the gods invokes the magico-religious aspect of fertility, one often expressed during agricultural fertility festivals, which will be discussed below and which always seem to bear direct correlation to human fertility and hence conception at the same time, as Hori *et al.*

express 'There are magico-artistic and orgiastic elements including sexual excesses, especially in the festivals of early spring, to celebrate the coming of spring and to pray for a good harvest in the coming autumn' (Hori *et al.*, 1968: 21).

Although an exhaustive examination of the various child-blessing deities in Japanese culture can not be undertaken here, a short overview of the various main deities to whom the safe keeping of mother and child is attributed is necessary in order to gain some understanding of the variety as well as their vastly differing origins.

Looking through a magazine aimed at expecting mothers or women aiming to conceive, the amount of shrines and temples advertising is immediately striking. Most of these have the typical cutesy images of impending motherhood as well as, what which might seem idiosyncratic, a dog. The shrines or temples in question are advertising *obi-iwai* [帯祝い], the ceremonial wrapping of the maternity sash, which occurs in the 5<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy and will be addressed later, in the chapter on pregnancy. However, amidst the advertisements for the Day of the Dog, there are also advertisements for shrines and temples claiming to be *kodakara* [子宝] or possessing conception-granting deities. Often these will be full fledged temples or shrines but equally often they will be roadside statues or a rock or a natural element, or a natural hot spring believed to possess this power.

Among the cornucopia of deities that offer protection for children, there are in fact four deities in the Japanese religious environment that are most commonly associated with fertility, easy delivery and the well-being of children. Although they differ between areas of Japan they still remain largely the same. These are *Suiten*, *Kannon*, *Jizō* and *Kishimoji*, who have all developed historically so as to have, amongst other powers, the power to bless women with children. All, but particularly *Jizō* and *Kannon*, possess dozens of unique forms, all presumed to have differing healing powers, yet very often interrelating. The deity most often brought up by the interviewees, as well as in the questionnaire, was *Suiten*, and invariably in connection

with *Suitengu* Shrine in Tokyo<sup>19</sup>. *Suitengu*, it is believed, sprang from Shinto tradition, but given Japan's fluid religious environment, the traditions have merged, giving them a similar feel, with the imagery and the symbolism joining together in a syncretism exemplified in the Shinto goddess *Koyasu-sama*, who has Buddhist counterparts in the form of *Koyasu Kannon*, *Koyasu Jizō*, *Koyasu Kishibojin* and *Jibo Kannon*<sup>20</sup>. It is also of interest to note the lack of differentiation among the Japanese populace between Shrines and Temples or Shinto and Buddhist deities, as exemplified when Ella Wiswell asked whether women in the midst of pregnancy were allowed to visit Shrines due to the polluting element of pregnancy and the woman answered that yes, they would visit *Kannon sama*, a Buddhist deity (Smith and Wiswell, 1982: 93), she herself not making a distinction between Shinto shrines and a Buddhist temple. A further example is when during a festival in Tokyo the author was approached by student friends who couldn't reach an agreement as to whether a *jinja* (shrine) belonged to Shintoism or Buddhism. In spite of Shinto being most commonly associated with birth and beginnings in Japanese religious culture, and Buddhism with death and funerals, there does not seem to be a clear differentiation in people's minds, and among younger people there is often confusion as to whether a shrine or a temple applies to which religion. This ambivalence is also present when people seek out ceremonies normally associated with Shinto at a Buddhist temple, as is the case with Nakayama temple<sup>21</sup>, where people, due to having sought assistance with fertility and birth there previously, decide to continue and attend *shichi-go-san*, the ritual for seven-five-three-year olds normally associated with Shinto shrines (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 142). (PE08) laughingly exclaimed that she went to *Suitengu* and asked for a boy but ended up getting 2 girls. (PE07) sought assistance from a shrine as well, while (PE25) exclaims that *It is good to go to a shrine, in particular Semboku shrine in Akita and pray for divine assistance*. (PE05) *Around me there haven't been any people who wished for children yet couldn't conceive, however in my neighbourhood there is a stone*

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<sup>19</sup> 2-4-1, Nihombashi-Kakigaracho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

<sup>20</sup> Koyasu pertains to [子安], ease of delivery

<sup>21</sup> 2-11-1 Nakayamadera, Takarazuka

where people go to which for conception.

#### 4.3.1 Suiten

The Shinto deity of water, *Suijin* or *Suiten* [水天], is widely worshipped at "*Suitengu*" Shrines throughout Japan. *Suiten* is sometimes associated with *Benzaiten*, the Buddhist goddess of fine arts. The city Kurume in Fukuoka boasts the main *Suitengu* shrine<sup>22</sup>, but the Tokyo *Suitengu* shrine was by far most often mentioned in interviews, particularly in regards to blessings during pregnancy and as a place to pray for safe delivery. The *Suitengu* shrine<sup>23</sup> is said to trace back to 1818, in the Bunsei era of the Edo period, when the domain lord of Kurume (Kyushu area), Yoshinori Arima, transported a shrine from his homeland and founded a new one within his residential boundary in Edo. Although recognized as a fertility god, *Suitengu* was most often mentioned as a place to pray for safe delivery and as such will be discussed in depth in conjunction with *inu no hi* or 'Day of the Dog' in Section 5.3.1.

#### 4.3.2 Kannon

*Kannon* [観音], the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy—the Hindi 'Avalokitesvara'—was originally male, and is along with *Jizō* one of the most popular Bodhisattvas<sup>24</sup>. *Kannon* comes in many forms, and is depicted in 33 incarnations in one chapter of the Lotus Sutra (Paul, 1983: 144). Frequently associated with the lotus flower, the simplest form is known as *Sho-Kannon*, wherein she is sitting holding a lotus flower in one hand whilst gesturing with the other hand for it to fully bloom (Eliot, 1994 (1935): 352).

The three feminine forms most closely associated with children and motherhood are the *Kannon Cundi*, (the "mother of the Buddhas"); the *Koyasu Kannon* (child-giving *Kannon*); and the *Jibo Kannon* (loving-mother *Kannon*). These forms of *Kannon* have been merged with or confused with *Kariteimo*, the Shinto deity *Koyasu-sama* and the Shinto water deity *Suijin*.

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<sup>22</sup> 265-1 Senoshita-machi, Kurume-shi, Fukuoka

<sup>23</sup> 2-4-1 Nihombashi Kakigara-cho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

<sup>24</sup> A being who has voluntarily renounced full enlightenment to guide lesser beings through *rokudō* (the six realms of transmigration) (Schattschneider, 2001: 862).



The Kyomizu kannon-do [清水観音堂]<sup>25</sup> in the busy Ueno park in Tokyo, is built to resemble the Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto, and enshrines the *Kosodate Kannon* [子育て漢音], the protectress of child bearing and rearing. It was originally established in 1631, and moved to Ueno in 1698. As with most temples visitors are greeted by a large incense burner normally surrounded by people scooping up the smoke and placing on an ailing body part; the head for students, and the stomach for infertility. Famous for its child-granting capabilities, it boasts a large selection of talismans specifically aimed at conception and childbirth, as well as a number of the standard ones in the form of little dolls.

Upon talking to the monk overseeing the temple the author was assured that praying to *Kannon* sama invariably worked and that one need look no further than to the plenitude of dolls displayed inside.<sup>26</sup> The hall he referred to is to the right of the main hall, and once inside the darkened and very quiet hall one is faced with a small altar adorned with dolls as well as a statue of *Kannon*. Adorning the right side of the hall from floor to ceiling are shelves carrying rows upon rows of dolls of every variety, traditional, modern and western. These dolls carry with them the appreciation of women who, subsequent to their visiting the shrine and praying to the *Kosodate Kannon*, had managed to conceive. As a token of their gratitude they then, upon the birth of their child, brought a doll back for the deity. However, seeing as dolls are seen to carry with them some semblance of a soul, once the temple becomes overfilled they can not be merely thrown away unceremoniously. Hence on the 25th September the temple holds a big memorial service where during the ceremony the dolls are all gathered up and burned in an open ceremony. The idea pertaining to the necessity of burning magico-religious items is strong in Japan, as we shall see in the chapter on talismans *Omamori*. There is also the added element of the cultural belief that inanimate objects can come to life after a certain

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<sup>25</sup> 1-29 Ueno koen, Taito-ku, Tokyo

<sup>26</sup> April 2008

period, and dolls especially, having been loved can not be disposed of lightly.<sup>27</sup> The sheer magnitude of the dolls present coupled with the fact that they are burned every year showed how active the belief is.

Other famous fertility temples associated with *Kannon* include *Mara Kannon* Fertility temple outside of Tawarayama. It is famous for its array of phallic symbols, much akin to the Tagata Jinja, which will be discussed in conjunction with fertility festivals (Reader & Tanabe, 1998: 133).

#### 4.3.3 Jizō Bosatsu

*Jizō Bosatsu* [地藏] is one of the most popular Bodhisattvas, the belief in which has “widely and persistently permeated Japanese spiritual life for centuries” , with the earliest legends claiming he was first brought to Japan during the reign of emperor Shōmu (724-49) (Dykstra, 1978: 179). Interestingly, in western academic work he has however become synonymous with *mizuko kuyō*, the ritual for aborted fetuses, despite that ritual having only really become widespread in the last century. Whilst *mizuko kuyō* will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5, current findings would argue that in the mind of most Japanese that is not the immediate association, rather that his primary associations as are the guide for wayfaring travellers and children. Often recognized by a red bib, statues of *Jizō* are ubiquitous throughout Japan, typically at the side of roads, in caves, on mountain sides as well as in temple grounds. Although there are over 80 forms of *jizō* the large majority of the ones travellers will happen upon will be dedicated to children or travellers (Visser, 1914). De Visser also remarks on the connection of the name of *jizō* and its protective element, as the kanji for Ji [地] stands for earth and Zō [蔵] means womb, drawing immediately a strong connection between *jizō* and fertility (Visser, 1914: 108).

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<sup>27</sup> Dolls are often perceived as having or developing souls. Hence, when, whilst discussing dolls with character amongst university friends, I mentioned that my daughter had one teddy that unlike all others we always referred to by name and treated gently in an almost human manner. I was very taken aback by the group’s strong reaction, and it was explained most emphatically to me that I could not just throw him away once my daughter lost interest, but that he had to be ceremonially burned so as to make sure his spirit would not follow us and haunt us.

Originally named Ksitigarbha, *Jizō* seeks to shorten the time spent in hell by suffering souls and whilst doing so chooses to postpone his own buddhahood in order to assist others in achieving the same thus acquiring the title *bosatsu* or *bodhisvatta*. This protective element appears widely through folktales where *Jizō* elects to protect someone, often a child, from evil supernatural forces or from landing in hell. Often depicted with children playing or hiding in his robes, stories such as where an abbot finds the *jizō* statue with wet robes and burning hot staff, having just returned from saving children in hell, abound (Miyazaki & Williams, 2004: 411). There is also a variation of the game ‘it’ (*kotorō kotorō*) wherein a child is being chased by a demon (*oni*) and *jizō* rescues them from hell, further strengthening the theme (Dykstra, 1978: 189).

#### **4.3.4 The goddess *Kishimojin***

*Kishimojin* [鬼子母神] is an Indian demoness by the name of ‘Hariti’ (Eliot, 1994 (1935): 138; Kobayasi, 2009: 64; Ōrō, 1983: 222). Having originated as the demoness ‘Hariti’ in Hindu myth, she was later incorporated into Japanese Buddhism despite having been a Hindu god with no connection to Buddhism (Eliot, 1994 (1935): 35). A special guardian and protectress of children, she was originally a far cry from the benevolent being she is today. An ogress mother to hundreds of children and finding it hard to feed all those mouths, she kidnapped other people’s children so as to feed them to her own. Buddha, in exasperation and heeding the cries of the bereaved mothers, hid one of Hariti’s own children (often named as her youngest and most favoured) under his bowl. Having searched for him frantically she finally appealed to Buddha for assistance, whereupon Buddha admonished her and instructed her to reflect upon the pain and grief she had so long caused others. Seeing her remorse Buddha finally restored the child to her and her reformation was such that once having accepted Buddhism she became the child-granting guardian of children (Hackin & Couchoud, 1994 (1932): 435; Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 93).

Although sometimes depicted as an ogress, she is generally either represented as sitting

surrounded by children or standing robed in silken garments with either a pomegranate or a lotus flower in one hand and her favourite child in her left (Hackin & Couchoud, 1994 (1932): 435; Orō, 1983).

At the Kishimojin temple in Tokyo<sup>28</sup>, pomegranate fruit is very prominent, both on *ema* tablets (see next section) and as a decorative motive, both painted and carved. According to the legend, the connection to pomegranate is due to Buddha having given her a pomegranate fruit once she repented and the fruit's colouring and taste worked as a substitute for the raw meat<sup>29</sup> (Kobayashi, 2009: 64). However as Patricia Langley has pointed out, the pomegranate has long been associated with life, regeneration and marriage (Langley, 2000).

Interestingly enough, throughout the interviews and questionnaire no individual gods nor goddesses were named as such. Many respondents mentioned having attended a local shrine or temple, or having received *omamori* from relatives but never was there a direct reference to the relevant deity. Although featured directly in neither the questionnaire nor the interviews, observations of the plenitude of *emas*, or the votive plates to be described below, expressing people's wishes for children posted prominently on racks alongside both shrines and temples known for their child-granting powers, clearly indicate that the belief in these deities is very much alive, and as Ian Reader has pointed out, in particular it is an act of tradition amongst the young (Reader, 1991: 180).

One reason for which the deities were not mentioned directly is, I believe, by virtue of again the fluidity of the Japanese religious environment; exactly which temple or shrine to go to does not seem to be of prime importance, merely whether people attend them or not.

#### **4.4 Festivals directly linked to fertility**

Integral parts of Japanese culture are the frequent and very colourful festivals. The

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<sup>28</sup>. 3-15-20 Zoshigaya, Toshima-ku, Tokyo

<sup>29</sup>. Pomegranate has been known through history for its medical properties and revered as a fertility symbol (Langley, 2000).

Japanese seasonal calendar has certain major festivals celebrated across the whole country, and then there are a number of local, and very often idiosyncratic, festivals. The latter, *matsuri*, tend to be affiliated to the local shrines and thus to the local deities. Early spring in Japan is marked by an abundance of these local festivals, a large portion of which are agricultural in nature and hence aimed at fertility. Although aimed at growth and bountiful harvests, the sexual imagery is such that there can be very little doubt that it is not solely aimed at the fertility of the fields.

The spring fertility festivals offer plenty of opportunity to catch a bit of the magic floating around, as almost anything connected to the festivals is said to promote fertility. The festivals are almost aggressively sexual, with genital imagery imposed on a variety of wares. The shrine itself in most cases possesses a variety of phallic and vulvar likenesses, many carved out of wood or stone, others being natural occurring formations, as well as a multitude of statues, gourds, bells and a number of other things all shaped in form of phalli and vulvas. Aside from the obvious religious imagery in the shrines, it has also been stylized and transposed to foods, such as pancakes in phallic form, sweets depicting both female and male genitals, chocolate covered bananas cut to resemble a phallus, as well as corn dogs. Also readily available are traditional explicit books, suggestive sake bottles and statues.

All of these, the participant is informed by eager sales people in booths, are said to enhance a person's fertility. Although not official *per se*, guests happily partake, with women expressing both apprehension as well as wishfulness, often in a joking manner. This connection between agricultural fertility and human fertility has always been close, as Eliade expresses 'the fertility of women influences the fertility of the fields, but the rich growth of plants in turn assists women in conceiving' (Eliade, 1994 (1958): 354).



Figure 7: A drinking set assured to bring fertility



Figure 8: The Tagata Shrine float



Figure 9: Children rubbing the phalli for fertility of the mind and luck on exams



Figure 10: A woman posing with a minor fertility float

Among the more famous of these fertility festivals in Japan is Hōnen festival [豊年祭] in the town of Komaki, just north of Nagoya, celebrated on 15th March every year. Its high point is when a *mikoshi* [見越し] (portable shrine) barely containing a two-and-a-half-metre-long carved wooden phallus weighing over 250 kilos is carried in a procession from either Kumano-sha Shrine (in odd-numbered years) or Shinmei-sha Shrine (in even-numbered years) through the town to Tagata Shrine<sup>30</sup> [田縣神社].

Before the procession, spectators and participants are invited to view the *mikoshi* on the shrine grounds and a 42-year-old gentleman dressed ready for the festival (and obviously having partaken considerably of the sake beforehand) assured the author that taking part in the festivities, and stroking the phallus would inevitably lead to fertility.

<sup>30</sup> 152- Tagata-chou, Komaki-shi, Aichi-ken

Throughout the festival there was a sense of joviality, as although the procession starts sombrely, the later stages are all the more vibrant, those partaking in the procession carrying the *mikoshi* imbibe considerable amounts of sake both before and during the procession, and sake is freely offered to bystanders<sup>31</sup>. As the procession passes, shrine maidens carrying smaller carved phalluses make sure to come within stroke reach of the bystanders so as to share the fertility they claimed ranged from academic to childbearing.

Tagata shrine itself is dedicated to Izanagi [伊弉諾 (in the Kojiki)] and [伊邪那岐 (in Nihon Shoki/Nihongi)] who, along with his sister and spouse Izanami, brought forth the many islands of Japan. The shrine has a counterpart not far away, in Ogata Shrine. Dedicated to Izanami, it, like Tagata shrine, attracts women devotees praying for the birth of a child. On the Sunday before the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, Ogata shrine holds the Hime-no-Miya matsuri, wherein a *mikoshi* bearing female genitalia is carried through town. Other fertility festivals include Kanamara Matsuri, held 15th April at Wakamiya Hachimangu Shrine in Kawasaki, and Konsei Matsuri, held at Osawa Onsen in Hanamaki, Iwate Prefecture.

In spite of the sexual overttness there is also an element of the fertility of the mind, a bountifulness that can be applied to different areas of a person's life

Just as the men 'suffering' *yakudoshi* take part in the festival, thus cleansing themselves of their accumulated pollution and to a certain degree starting afresh, couples coming to the festival seeking aid with conception are doing the same. Just as the average Japanese man buys car insurance, has his new car blessed by a priest and then gets a talisman to hang in the front window, there are no absolutes when it comes to Japanese belief and ritual; all can and will be amalgamated into a composite of what might work to bring about that which is wished for.

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<sup>31</sup> Based on observations in spring 2008 and 2009.

#### **4.5 Ema and Omamori, talismans and wish granters**

*Ema* [絵馬] are votive tablets, most often bought at a shrine or a temple, and upon which a person writes their wish or prayer, often for the benefit of others, and then hangs up on a specific wooden structure. Generally these structures will be laden with layers upon layers of tablets, indicating the number of people who have left their prayers. Although available in all shapes and forms, the most common is that of a wooden irregular pentagonal-shaped tablet. Originating in Shinto, it is now equally associated with the temples, as is often the case with Japanese religious phenomena. A staple in Japanese religious tradition, the earliest preserved *ema* go back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, although earlier literary references to them exist (Hickman, 1983: 197). According to Reader, Buddhist temples started making use of the *ema* tablets around the Kamakura period, 1185–1333 (Reader, 1991a: 30).

The illustrations upon the *ema* vary; a typical one has the deity enshrined, the yearly animal according to the 12-animal zodiac cycle, or a deity worshipped. The back of the *ema* generally remains empty, as it is there that the person will write their prayers or wishes.

More specific *ema* tend to depict that which the person desires, with symbols and meanings, such as an *ema* depicting 'a dog indicating easy childbirth, the dog being traditionally associated with easy and safe birth in Japan' (Reader, 1991: 31); pairs of eyes to help with sight problems; milk streaming from mothers' breasts to help with milk production; or a child seated happily in a bath for children who do not like bathing (Hickman, 1983: 197).

As Reader put it, the *ema* works 'by expressing and externalizing a need and putting it into concrete form'. The *ema* that are particularly aimed at fertility vary a great deal. Often you will find that a temple or a shrine has various ones aimed at differing prayers, and quite often one can find one depicting a dog both for fertility as well as a felicitous pregnancy and birth. Many depict one of the abovementioned deities, while the Tagata shrine *ema* depicts a phallus, and *Kisimojin* temple has two types, both depicting pomegranate fruit.



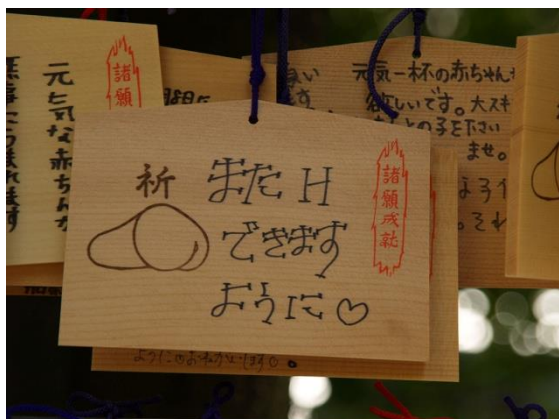


Figure 11: Seeking assistance at Tagata Jinja



Figure 12: The dog as a symbol of easy delivery

*Omamori* [お守り], in contrast, are Japanese amulets dedicated to particular Shinto deities as well as Buddhist figures. Found ubiquitously at Shrines and temples in Japan, the word *mamoru* means to defend and protect, with *omamori* meaning honorable protector. Falling between being a good luck charm and a religious talisman, the amulet is usually made of cloth or silk and is carried on the person. According to numerous sources, opening the pouch will cause the talisman to lose its power, but they are reputed to contain ‘a prayer or some form of religious inscription, invocation or sacred text’ (Reader & Tanabe, 1988: 46). Often they will contain a sliver of wood or a coin. These talismans can bring luck, ward off bad luck, assist with tasks or ordeals, and, seeing as they are to be carried on the person, are often spotted on mobile phones, bags or hanging off the rear-view mirror in a car. Although generic ones are available, the norm is that each shrine or temple displays an array of *omamori*, each one specifically aimed at one area of personal life. The more common ones are health, safety in driving, love, studies, the protection of children and those pertaining to this research: fertility, *kodakara* [子宝] and ease of pregnancy and birthing, *anzan* [安産].<sup>32</sup>

Although the traditional ones are in silk pouches depicting the area of protection and with the name of the shrine or temple, more exotic ones abound, such as small school bags or

<sup>32</sup> Kotsu anzen (交通安全); Safety in traffic, Yaku yoke (厄除け); To ward against evil, Kaiun (開運); For luck and fortune; Gakugyo joju (学業成就); For education and passing exams, Shobai hanjo (商売繁盛); For prosperity in business, Musubi (縁結び); For fortune in love and marriage, Anzan (安産); To secure a safe and easy delivery, Kodakara (子宝).

Hello Kitty™ ones for a child's studies, a doll in a cow costume for the year<sup>33</sup>, or even for the protection of cameras.

Amulets do not expire, although they are commonly replaced every year to ward off bad luck from the previous year. There are also modern commercial versions of these that are typically not spiritual in nature and are not issued by a Shrine or Temple. These do not confer protection or need to be replaced every year. It has become popular for stores in Japan to feature generic *omamori* with popular characters such as Mickey Mouse or various sports themes. The idea of *omamori* is also very fluid, as exemplified by students perceiving photographs in their mobile phones as *omamori* (Okabe, 2004: 8).

Old amulets are usually returned to the shrine or temple so they can be disposed of properly with ceremonial fire, as with the abovementioned dolls, and this normally takes place during the New Year celebrations or during *setsubun* [節分]<sup>34</sup>. Fertility amulets are supposed to be returned upon conception, and when buying pregnancy *omamori* I was quite often advised of the fact that the talisman was supposed to be returned upon the safe birth of the child. During the research the author however found that none of the mothers interviewed had in fact returned the amulet(s) they had received; rather they were kept in a memorial box along with the child's *meimei*<sup>35</sup> and the stub of their umbilical cord, sometimes even the child's first nail clippings. In one instance the mother, PE10, had received so many *omamori* during the pregnancy that she had formed a mobile of sorts by attaching them to a clothes hanger and hung above the child's bed as both a decorative as well as a protective item.

Although women generally receive a small box in which to place the umbilical stub from the hospital, some shrines and temples, for instance *Kishimojin* temple, sell *anzan omamori* that are in a particular box meant for that purpose.

Without exception everyone interviewed expressed the notion that there was no difference

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<sup>33</sup> The year 2010 being the year of the Ox

<sup>34</sup> February 3<sup>rd</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Naming paper

between purchasing an *omamori* in a shrine or a temple. Additionally there was no clear distinction in the responses between *kodakara* and *anzan omamori*, and most of the *omamori* were received once the woman was already pregnant. Only a couple indicated that close friends had bought them *kodakara omamori* whilst they were trying to get pregnant, which they kept hidden. Three responses indicated that the mother-in-law, the husband's mother, was likely to purchase such an amulet, with two expressing that that would be a pushy, inappropriate thing to do.

As to whether buying an *omamori* constitutes a religious activity and belief in its power, Wilburn argues, 'whether the Japanese believe in the effectiveness of a talisman purchased from a reputable temple or shrine offering safe childbirth or not, those talismans, and many others like them, are sold in great numbers (Wilburn, 2007: 118).

*Anzan is normally given by the family, by the grandmother. Not normally by the people themselves (PE01).* When I asked if the *omamori* worked, she said she thought it was a matter of the heart, of the spirit. *The omamori brings a feeling of comfort (PE01).* However different positions are also expressed. *Many people around me who wanted to become pregnant bought omamori, I on the other hand went to the hospital (PE12).*

*I got a lot, from everyone around me. Grandmother, friends, the baby's grandfather. I myself recieved the omamori from Meiji Jingu, but other friends brought me from Suitengu, and when a new subway station opened my friend got me an omamori from there to commemorate (PE12).* She then fashioned the *omamori* into a mobile she hung above the child's bed as a protective element of sorts.

*The omamori is filled with feelings of religion and spirituality, and I feel it strongly, you see you often hear that you musn't throw away an amulet. So you're supposed to take it back to the shrine or temple. Therefore I don't give omamori because it can be troublesome for the person, I do not feel I can freely distribute them. So I don't give them and definitely not to a blood relative (PE14).*

As for social pressures being expressed: *I think a bride especially one that is married in the countryside and to the eldest son of a house, I think she's likely to get omamori from her mother-in-law. They're saying they want a boy soon, an heir. This happened to my friend. She found it to be a bit too much pressure, she found it stressful* (PE18).

*When a family wishes for a child the father or the mother-in law will often buy kodakara omamori* (PE03).



Figure 13: A typical display of omamori at a shrine



Figure 14: A mother made a decorative protective mobile out of the omamori



Figure 15: Ema with a picture of a dog for fertility



Figure 16: Ema with the image of a Pomegranate for fertility

## 4.6 *Magical powers of hot springs*

An oft-mentioned method of facilitating conception found both in the questionnaire, as well as in the interviews, particularly by those living in the north, was that of visiting hot springs known for their fertility inducing powers. Hot springs all over the world are often renowned for their distinctive healing elements. The use of natural hot springs, *onsen* [温泉], for bathing has been a standard practice in Japanese culture for centuries, with archaeological evidence thereof having been unearthed near the Yuda hot spring (Iwate Prefecture) dating from the period before 11,000 B.C., and at the Kawazu hot spring (Nagasaki Prefecture), dating from the Jomon period (11,000–300 B.C.) (Sekioka, 1990).

There are numerous references to baths and bathing in the myths of Kojiki [古事記], indicating religious connotations, and later references support that idea, *vide* the ceremonial baths practiced by emperors and courtiers as parts of rites (Butler, 2005). Under Buddhism, bathhouses became a common feature at large Buddhist temples.

The most famous of the therapeutic baths, *kusuriburo* [薬風呂], was at Arima [有馬], in the outskirts of present-day Kobe. Arima's springs were well known from ancient times. As chronicled in the Nihongi/Nihon shoki [日本書紀], Emperor Jomei [舒明] (593–641) made excursions to Arima in both 631 and 638, staying for eight days and three months respectively (Butler, 2005: 5). In 647, emperor Kōtoku [孝徳] also stayed for eighty days. According to legend, both emperors lamented the lack of an heir, and seeing that as soon after the visit they begat a child the waters became associated with fertility (Guichard-Anguis, 2002: 248).

Again the element of cleansing appears, namely that in order to become pregnant one needs to be clean and blessed. Interestingly enough, although many mentioned this as a fertility option, not one of my respondents could name a single one nor had they ever visited one themselves, although PE24, a 31-year-old respondent in Akita, laughingly answered that she had in all probability unwittingly visited one at some time or another. *I don't know, I was always so fertile (laugh), but I have heard of going to onsen* (PE26). Then she couldn't

recommend any precise ones, but suggested I look them up online. Katsuki Gyozan argued in the 16th century that a ‘cold womb’ could be the cause of infertility and therefore there were hardly any infertile women in the onsen townships (Quoted in Burns, 202: 183).

#### ***4.7 A girl or a boy: gender determining and modern science***

The question of gender determining is a sensitive yet a very common one throughout history. The issue of whether one can influence the gender of the future foetus has long been a matter of contention with such ancient scholars as Aristotle, Plutarch *Moralia* and Galen contending that the materials needed to make a male child were to be found in the woman’s right side, hence prescribing that the woman should lie on her right side if they wanted a boy and on her left side if they wished for a girl (McCarthy, 1922: 63).

Being one of the most diligently answered questions on the questionnaire, the answers returned were extremely varied. One thing, however, stood out; gender was predominantly determined by food. This emphasis on food is not surprising in a country that assigns such cultural and ritual significance to food as Japan, as Ashkenazi notes some of the earliest writing on food in Japan was a manual on the relationship between food and religious practice by Dōgen (1200–1253) (Ashkenazi, 2000: 17). A proper Japanese meal balances aesthetics and prime ingredients with ritual and is revered and appreciated for its artistry.

As was to be expected, the foods suggested contrast each other. In particular, foods increasing the alkalinity or the acidity of the mother were perceived as having an effect on the gender. Answers varied though on whether it was the mother or the father-to-be that was supposed to eat the food, although in most cases it was the mother. The idea of alkalinity of foods is widespread in Japan and is explained by Ohnuki-Tierney thus in 1977: ‘In the acid group, meat, poultry, fish, butter, cheese, egg yolk, rice, bread, noodles, Japanese sake, beer. Whereas in the alkaline, vegetables, fruits, egg whites, milk, soybeans, mushrooms, wine’ (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 77).

Around half the respondents were not sure which way it went in order to secure a particular gender, although most settled upon meat for a boy and vegetables for a girl. This was exemplified by respondent PE01, when she said “Eating meat or eating vegetables: eating meat will result in a female and vegetables a male, or was it the other way around” she asked looking questioningly at others in the room, until deciding that it was the other way around, that eating meat led to male children and vegetables female.

Although most emphasised the mother’s eating habits, the father also came into play, as PE07 pointed out that *the father is supposed to eat a lot of meat if you want a boy, but if you want a girl you feed him a lot of vegetable courses as well as fish*. The fathers also came into play when it came to alcohol, a big taboo if imbibed by the mother. QU83 mentioned that were the father to drink *Shōchu* every day he would beget boys— finishing by pointing out that a friend of hers had had five boys that way. A number of people, although not using the method themselves, had heard of others putting it to the test.

Variants within the realm of food included QU50 pointing out that eating plenty of seaweed produced a girl. Generally salty foods and protein rich foods were said to induce a boy, with sweet food predisposed for a girl. As is often found when looking at pregnancy, traditional Japanese food featured heavily, *Umeboshi*, the Japanese pickled plum was thought to affect the gender, although QU41 could not remember which way before concluding that it all “seemed like nonsense though”.

Contrasts, such as salty/sweet, meat/vegetables, alkaline/acidic were often mentioned, with most interviewees stressing that either gender was fine. Many were unsure as to what food types led to which gender. It did become obvious that there still is a slight element of families in farming communities—as well as interestingly enough, wealthy families—pressuring for a boy. One such example was from Akita, PE24 a 43-year-old from Akita city told me of a clinic *Umiwake pro* (産み分けプロ)<sup>36</sup> frequented by many in the area, including friends of hers, where the doctor promises 93% success rate, and then added that so far there had only

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<sup>36</sup> In all likelihood this establishment <<http://yasuda-lc.jp/>>

been two ‘mistakes’, the ‘mistakes’ of course referring to ‘girls’. Akita city is very much in rural Japan and PE24 emphasised that this gender bias was something she only associated with farming families.

Another example of medical intervention still related to the alkalinity and the acidity of the body was that of going to the doctor to get specific vaginal jelly that would eliminate all male or female sperm respectively. PE27, a 33-year-old respondent, lamented the fact that she was trying for her first child and hence was not eligible for such jellies. At the same time a few of her friends had used them, although only one with success.

Other methods expressed only once included the gender based on the sexual position (32-year-old from Osaka) whilst a childless 22-year-old from Tokyo had heard that if women go skiing they are more likely to have a girl.

Timing was also an issue for two ladies, with a 29- and a 31-year-old, from Tokyo expressing having heard from friends trying for a girl that timing was important, yet not knowing the details, whereas a 59-year-old from Tokyo mentioned that ‘boy sperm’ was weaker at night time.

Although there is no limit to how many children a person can have in Japan, extremely few have more than three, and most couples only one, although most expressed some gender preferences akin to wanting one of each, with a pretty girl and an acknowledged undercurrent of wanting a boy to carry on the family name and take over the home. This was particularly expressed in rural areas and in connection with wealthy families. PE07, aged 67, made light of such wishes when she laughingly explained “I hoped for a boy, my husband wanted a boy, so I went to the *jinja* to ask for a boy, but instead I got two girls”.

*Yes I have heard of this. If you eat meat then it's a girl she starts to sound hesitant you eat vegetables and it will result in a girl ... or was it the other way around?* Then she reaches a conclusion and firmly attests the opposite also saying that she heard this as a child (PE1). *If the woman is strong then it's a boy if the man is strong then it's a girl.* I asked if she meant



body or spirit, she affirmed body (PE1). *If the man, the husband, desperately<sup>37</sup> wants a child then it'll be a girl but if the mother desperately wants a child then it'll be a boy* (PE26). *My mother also told me that if the man eats one banana a day a girl will be born, however a boy was born so it didn't really work* (laughter) (PE26).

The physical position during sex was also believed to have an effect *I didn't do anything in particular but I know you can help by choosing different positions during sex*. When I probed further she couldn't tell me which positions, but said: *This seems certain, I even read it in a book and my friend did this* (PE12). Echoing such ancient sources as Aristotle, Plutarch Moralia and Galen.<sup>38</sup>

A recurring response was this: *When you eat acidic foods and when you eat alkaline foods it has an effect but I can't remember which* (PE19).

*After talking with my friends and wanting a boy I ate a lot of citrus fruit. If you eat plenty of fruit you're supposed to get a boy. And my friend also ate a lot of fruits. (laughter). I don't know if it's true but we both gave birth to boys* (PE22). *Basal temperature, measuring of ovulation then immediately she goes over to food and gender .. in regards to food, well food that makes it easier to have a boy ...In Japan there are certain foods that makes it easier to conceive a boy or food that makes it easier to conceive a girl, you know? For instance alkaloid foods.. erm yes alkaloid foods (arukari sei) will lead to a female child being conceived and (san sei) foods will result in a girl is what they say. So when you wish for a girl you eat plenty of vegetables. This I have both read about as well as heard of* (PE03).

33 year old used the food technique for want of having access to what she sought after. *Well according this book I read, vegetables make a girl and meat makes a boy but I don't really believe it. I'd go to a hospital and get the vaginal jelly which increases acidity or alkalinity*. Then she bemoans the fact that she can't do it as she's not had a child yet and only those who have one child are allowed to (PE27). The vaginal jelly was mentioned by a

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<sup>37</sup> 一所懸命 【いっしょけんめい】 the choice of wording can be translated as very hard; with utmost effort; with all one's might; desperately; frantically; for dear life;

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle 765a 4 -18; Plutarch Moralia 905E; Galen 4. 174-175.

number of respondents, was apparently available to women who already had one child, and was doctor issued, thus scientifically acceptable.

Only one respondent brought up specific clinics that promise to assist with getting the gender you wish for, and according to the respondent they have a very high success rate. She also brought up that this was only common in the countryside as farming families needed sons in order to take over from them.

*Umiwake.. A: Well , I've heard people speak about " birth divided " well , people who go to that obstetrics and gynecology place, and by in vitro fertilization they separate the X-gene, the Y-gene as well , It's only the rich that go for this . But not my friends . Because , because it is very high treatment , very expensive. (PE03).*

And finally a 68 year old woman from Tokyo *Well, when I want a boy, well, the husband, well the man, eats meat, the power of the meat. But, when you eat I think vegetables and fish then you get a girl. That's what I heard. And that's what happened (PE07).*

## **4.8 Chapter review**

The emphasis on food as a means of influencing the gender of a child is conspicuous when reviewing this chapter. Food is generally of great importance in Japanese culture and is commonly heavily determined by the time of year, annual celebrations as well as religious symbolism. The idea of sympathetic magic reverberates throughout, with meat, protein, alkali and strength being assigned to the male, and vegetables, fish, sweetness and acidity to the female. Apart from herring roe, the superstitions that so exemplified conceiving according to earlier references, such as in *Nihonsan' iku Shūzoku Shiryō Shūsei* [日本産育習俗資料集成], seem to have disappeared to a great extent and appear only in relation to selecting the gender.

At the same time the knowledge of the negative side of being born in the year of Hinoeuma seems very alive and active, with people expressing opinions on the validity of such a belief and validating their knowledge by referring to statistical data. Whether it

constitutes a real belief and whether people would themselves shy away from bearing children under such circumstances is uncertain, and nigh impossible to ascertain until 2026.

There is a marked fluidity within the Japanese religious environment wherein deities can take on the qualities, even names or elements from other deities, thus perhaps strengthening the tendency of people to not worry overly when it comes to choosing the shrine or temple in which to pray. The primary importance seemed not to be on which deity had blessed the talisman but just that a fertility or child-granting deity had been at play. There was also a marked difference in attitudes towards shrines and temples between the north and central Japan, with the people in Akita being far less likely to attend one when it came to conception.

The noticeably sharp contrast between the answers obtained from the questionnaire and during personal interviews was striking, with conception-related questions being answered in a more scientific mindset in the questionnaire as well as in shorter sentences, whilst the interviews yielded fuller, deeper answers and were much more likely to produce religious or superstitious views. This might have been in part due to the respondents not being certain of what kind of information was being sought to begin with, which then became more obvious as the questionnaire rolled on. Likewise during the interviews the respondents were hesitant to reveal 'superstitious' thought very early on as they were still deciding on whether they could trust the interviewer and an apprehension if their answers might be ridiculed—something reflected clearly in the answers and the development therein as the interviews progressed.

Conception, being a private matter, not readily discussed in times of trouble and needless to discuss when all goes well, does not *per se* lend itself well to research. Pressing too hard for information is considered inconsiderate and rude, especially in such private matters, so that generally only a few close family members or friends tend to possess the knowledge. The more obvious factors such as festivals and deities which everyone comes across were far easier to access for the sake of research. However as soon as the woman becomes pregnant, the sharing information flows more quickly and the private rituals become far more obvious,

making conversations easier to start and making the knowledge shared in the next chapters at times much deeper.

What seems to be obvious is that beliefs pertaining to gender selection are well and thriving, albeit with a scientific overtone. The cleanliness involved in attending a hot spa famed for its child giving properties and the popularity thereof would also seem to indicate a strong ritual element<sup>39</sup>. Overt religious beliefs, *omamori* aside, do not seem to manifest unless there is a hindrance, such as when conceiving has been problematic or ill health or bad luck seems to have befallen unseemingly often. There are visible ritual elements to conception, with the liminal element of pregnancy starting to become noticeable when people are faced with difficult conceptions and seeking assistance from deities or purification rituals. For most people however conception happens naturally and without much assistance. The next chapter will look at if and in what manner the life of the woman is changed during the pregnancy, whether supernatural elements seem stronger and more likely to affect the life of the mother and child.

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<sup>39</sup> A quick search yields dozens of such onsen < <http://wr2425.ciao.jp/1aonsen.html> >



## Chapter 5: Pregnancy

The gestation period, the pregnancy itself, marks the beginning of the visible and notable liminal period of the childbearing process. The woman is no longer solely a woman, yet she is not yet a mother, as Turner put it “When the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definitely shape” (Turner, 1980, in Myerhoff, 1982).

Pregnancy is very well documented and regulated in Japan and infant mortality one of the lowest in the world (Wennemo, 1993). There is generally a sentiment of trust expressed toward the obstetrician and the process. The monitoring commences once the pregnancy is registered with the local authority, and over 90% of all pregnancies are registered before the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy (Miyaji and Lock, 1994). Immediately upon registering a pregnancy with the local officials the mother-to-be is presented with the *boshi kenkō techō* [母子健康手帳]<sup>40</sup>, the maternal and child healthbook which she is expected to carry with her throughout the pregnancy. A standard procedure since 1947 the handbook allows for travelling between doctors, hospitals and areas as all data pertinent to the pregnancy will be noted therein (Nakamura, 2010: 261; Sato, 1999; Bernstein, 1982: 111). Later, the handbook will also monitor the child’s vaccinations, developmental curve as well as the results of health checkups. Seeing as all the data pertaining to the pregnancy is contained in the book it allows for easy manoeuvrability, as often first time mothers will return to their hometown in order to give birth, in a custom called *satogaeri*. The handbook also functions as an identity card for the child and is, for instance, requested upon the child’s first passport application. A questionnaire survey conducted in 1999 found that amongst 10,900 respondents bringing their in children for their 18<sup>th</sup> month checkup, only 0.9% had lost their handbook and 97.8% had not only read the handbook but also made written notes (Fujimoto *et al.*, 2001). Various scholars have argued that one of the reasons for the low infant mortality rate experienced in Japan is in part due to the ingrained tradition of precise and unified documentation, as well as the frequency of check-ups (Nakamura, 2010: 261). Along with the handbook the mother-to-

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.mcfh.co.jp/searches/tag/6>

be receives coupons, a handbook with advice pertaining to the pregnancy as well as a key chain, declaring that *there is a baby in the belly* [おなかに赤ちゃんがいます] meant to secure the mother-to-be with seats on trains as well as other concessions (see figure below). Pre-natal visits are both regular and frequent and unlike in Britain or Iceland, ultrasound scans are performed throughout as a basic monitoring mechanism.

During the pregnancy there are a number of words that are used to describe being pregnant, yet all derive from the same origin: pregnancy, *ninshin* [妊娠] and it is of interest to note that there do not seem to be any of the euphemisms so often resorted to in the English language when referring to a pregnant woman, aside from “we made it”. Unlike the English language, Japanese has a single word or term applicable to a pregnant woman, which is *Ninpu* [妊婦], defining her as a new entity, a pregnant woman, no longer solely a woman.



Figure 17: A pregnant Woman carrying the pregnancy badge



Figure 18: Pregnancy Badge<sup>41</sup>

Unlike many cultures, the pregnancy is generally considered to consist of 10 months as it is calculated from the last day of the last period which, coupled with the pregnancy being counted in lunar months each consisting of 4 weeks rather than according to the Gregorian calendar, leads to a healthy 40-week pregnancy being around 10 months and ten days, *totsuki*

<sup>41</sup> Chiemi (2007), Maternity Mark for Expectant Mothers in Japan, *PingMag*, <http://pingmag.jp/2007/07/11/maternity-mark/>

*tōka*.<sup>42</sup> This difference in counting explains one considerable difference, which is the idea that in Japan the mother-to-be becomes officially pregnant in the fifth month, as that is when the pregnancy is perceived as being safe. Something which in Britain and Iceland tends to be at the end of the first trimester, the beginning of the fourth month. This in particular comes into play in regards to the maternity sash, which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

During the prenatal visits, this period of constant regular observation, the women are made to understand that the outcome is directly tied to their own behaviour. Thus if a woman has gained more than the recommended amount of weight the doctor may admonish her and have her weigh herself on a daily basis until she meets the recommended weight. There is a definite element of medicality wherein the mother is the carrier and it is up to her to make sure everything goes right (Burns, 2002). This cultural element is deeply rooted in the Japanese psyche and historically it came accompanied with the idea that if the woman did not produce a healthy heir for the family she had married into her purpose there was limited, thus the saying “*Hara wa kari mono*”, roughly translated as “The womb is a hired (borrowed) thing” (Burns, 2002; Buchanan, 1965: 99).

Throughout the interviews it quickly became apparent that the folk belief that had so long governed the pregnancy period had been largely forgotten, although the knowledge of some of them still remained. Overall, though, the emphasis had moved away from direct belief towards a technocratic belief, a series of beliefs thought to be scientifically proven, as well as mid-term rituals, in particular the wrapping of the maternity belt, had acquired a much larger place in the set of rituals than before. One reason is the very special symbiosis in the Japanese medical community between scientific medicine and *Kampō* [漢方], the healing system awarded official status in 1959 and aimed at establishing a balance between the mind and the body. Consequently many of the informants mentioned Moxa (moxibustion) as a healing agent. Ella Wiswell discusses Moxibustion having been recommended as a treatment for a

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<sup>42</sup> A very colloquial saying is that although the joy lasts mere 10 seconds the results are 10 months and ten days in the making [快樂十秒 ガキ十月十日]



“female disease” in 1930s Japan (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 97).

Great emphasis is placed on ultrasound scans as a necessary monitoring device in order to observe the natural development of the foetus. Japanese women living abroad have expressed trepidation over the lack thereof (Yanagisawa, 2009: 91).

### ***5.1 Influence upon the baby in the womb***

During pregnancy the child is perceived to be particularly vulnerable to outside forces, in particular the influences of the mother. Drawing on Confucian ideas, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century manuals for women emphasised the mother’s responsibility. One manual asking: "Why the agony of the difficult birth, and even death in childbirth?" The mother’s health cultivation was perceived to have been ‘bad’ or ‘incorrect’ thus leading to the agony which could have been avoided and was entirely her own fault (Burns, 2002: 186).

The polluting element associated with menses and birthing seems not to appear during pregnancy, and the pregnant woman can and has historically not been banned from participating in religious activities nor from entering shrines and temples. However other polluting elements can affect the child itself, in particular that of the black pollution, death. Death pollution, *kuro fujō*, is one of the strongest pollutants and as such the attendance of pregnant women at funerals is severely frowned upon. Attending funerals or visiting a house where a person has recently died was uniformly forbidden echoing the age old belief in the polluting power of death. One respondent though, upon insisting to attend her father-in-law's funeral had an outward facing mirror stuck down the front of her dress so as to be able to reflect the evil pollution away from the child.

A good mother is a laid-back mother, echoed throughout the literature and the interviews, no stressing. The mother-to-be was to focus on having a calm mind, listening to quality music and reading good literature. These modern attitudes are interestingly enough echoed in a 17<sup>th</sup>

century manual based on non-Confucian ideals, the Grasshopper manual, where the assumption is of a direct link between mother and child.

The child in the womb is of one breath with the mother. The state of the mother's heart is transferred to that of the child, and the movements of the mother's body are transferred to the child. Therefore, during pregnancy, if the mother's heart contains nothing incorrect and is gentle, the heart of the child that is born will be correct (Quoted in Burns, 2002: 187).

*I was told that I should talk nicely to the baby. Was it after 6 months, half a year? So the baby can discern the mother's voice and the father's voice. So father would pat the belly every morning and night and greet the baby (PE24). PE01, a 58-year-old mother of 3 from Akita: Interestingly it is not really spoken of around here, but now it is said that the infant in the womb can hear everything that goes around outside. If the mother is happy, sad, nervous, the child inside the womb is aware of all this. I didn't think of this when I was pregnant. When I was young these things weren't really common knowledge.*

What is interesting is that there seems to be a resurgence in older beliefs focusing on the responsibility of the mother.

### **5.1.1 Dietary restrictions and strictures**

Food perforce plays a vital role during pregnancy; not only is the mother being careful about nutrition but various cultural beliefs also come into play. On top of that, doctors are extremely strict as to the allowed weight gain of Japanese mothers, to the point of restricting food intake.

Although the collective work *Nihonsan' iku Shūzoku Shiryō Shūsei* gave a vast overview of the varying beliefs pertaining to particular items of food, few of them were mentioned by respondents, and none were believed. Some beliefs were recognised, such as the eating of octopus would cause a child to be born with soft bones, or shrimp causing the bones to break, but throughout the interviews the emphasis was always placed primarily upon eating healthy, based upon modern scientific knowledge. The first reaction when asked if any foods could be

inherently dangerous for a child during pregnancy, the answer was invariably coffee and cigarettes, quickly followed by soda.

A term I quickly became very familiar with was the ‘warm’ food versus ‘cooling’ food dichotomy, which reverberated throughout the interviews. After listing such necessities as calcium, and vitamins, eating healthy was very often synonymous with “eating Japanese” (*washoku* [和食]) as well as eating ‘warm’ foods. When further probed as to what constituted warm or cold food, all respondents had an opinion thereof, although not always identical. The main element was not to let the body cool down (*hiyasu*), hence cucumber, persimmon and watermelon were deemed not good for the child, whilst eggplant, root vegetables and traditional foods were considered healthier (Ivry, 2007).

When asked about warming foods, a 47-year-old respondent from Tokyo replied *Oh that’s the grandparents, my grandmother and great grandfather talk, they would frequently say this, as if eggplant could somehow cool the body. I had both my sons in winter so it’s a wonder they ever got warm (chuckles)* (PE13), expressing a slightly more relaxed attitude to the whole dichotomy.

A 68-year-old respondent from Akita mentioned: *Food that cools the body is bad, such as kaki* (persimmon), but then she couldn’t remember other foods (PE1). Later she mentioned the importance of not letting the body cool down. Meanwhile a 33-year-old from Akita said she wouldn’t have gotten through the pregnancy without herb tea to keep her warm (PE26), and the same respondent experienced a quandary when she seemed to recall *kaki* as being cooling, hence bad, yet also filled with vitamin C and thus good. She also shared that both her mother and the midwife had warned her about the dangers of cooling foods. A 36-year-old respondent from Gunma shared that *Foods that cool the body are bad, so for example vegetables such as cucumber, eggplant and tomatoes cool the body and are bad*. So are there any foods that warm the body? *Yes, vegetables, winter vegetables. I think radish, lotus root, burdock and carrots are good* (PE10). Similarly a 31-year-old nurse told me that *raw*

*vegetables cool the body, also cold drinks aren't good. Tomatoes, eggplant, cucumber and watermelon, the so-called summer food, has the effect of cooling down the body. Potatoes and certainly mushrooms warm the body. There are so many vitamins in the vegetables that are in season so they are very important (PE18).*

Foods that warm the body, along with the more traditional Japanese food as well as foods that are in season at that given time were the foods most recommended. Foods that were thought to be detrimental, aside from cooling food, was 'western' cuisine, very often directly associated with fast food (PE03). When probed as to negative foods, a 41-year-old from Kanagawa said *My mother mentioned cola or fizzy drinks, this I've heard is not good as it weakens the bones. So generally healthy foods, vegetables, root vegetables.*

When discussing the negative effects a pregnant woman's stressing might have upon the child, a 41-year-old respondent from Kanagawa diverted over to instant cup noodles and hamburgers, declaring that these foods would cause the child to be both impatient and lack strength (PE03). A 32-year-old who had drunk fizzy drinks during her pregnancy, expressed guilt over drinking carbonated drinks whilst pregnant, but justified it by saying that she'd done so merely so as to keep queasiness at bay (PE12). Most expressed the following opinion: *Japanese food, ensuring a wider variety and plenty of vegetables. But no, no good, high calorie fast food (PE24).*

A 29-year-old offered a novel explanation, saying that if the mother has cravings for fast food then she would be carrying a male child, while if she fancied Japanese food then she would be carrying a female child (PE16).

A 42-year-old respondent, upon telling me she had had a craving for burgers during her second pregnancy, expressed guilt, and was very apologetic, as if she had done something wrong, finishing by saying that today the daughter in question loves western food (PE14), indicating a belief in the causality of what you eat during pregnancy influencing the character of the child.

Some traditional beliefs were recognised, such as that the eating of octopus during pregnancy would cause a child to be born with soft bones, but there was also considerable overlap, as expressed by one respondent thus: After pondering for a bit, suddenly she exclaimed, *ika*, (octopus) *the bones come out all soft, then not something that cools, and then tuna, tuna sushi you know? Because of the mercury. Yes, those things aren't good* (PE26).

When asking an 85-year-old from Akita about dietary restrictions or warming or cooling food, she placed emphasis on the importance of the pregnant woman eating well and to get extra and nice food. And then added, *I ate fish every day, because there was no other food to be had, no meat, no eggs, every day fish* (PE21).

There are considerable feelings of guilt expressed when the mother feels she did not eat correctly enough, and these feelings are fed by the constant weight monitoring. At every health check the mother-to-be is to go in and weigh herself and carefully mark the new weight into her maternal handbook. If she's gained more than the allowed minimum she will be admonished. Only one source (from 1982) indicates that generous weight gain is acceptable (Bernstein, 1982: 111), whilst most references as well as respondents emphasised the stringent expectation of minimal weight gain. The following table shows the trends in mean birth weight, which has obviously come down in later years in a conscious effort to keep neonates smaller.

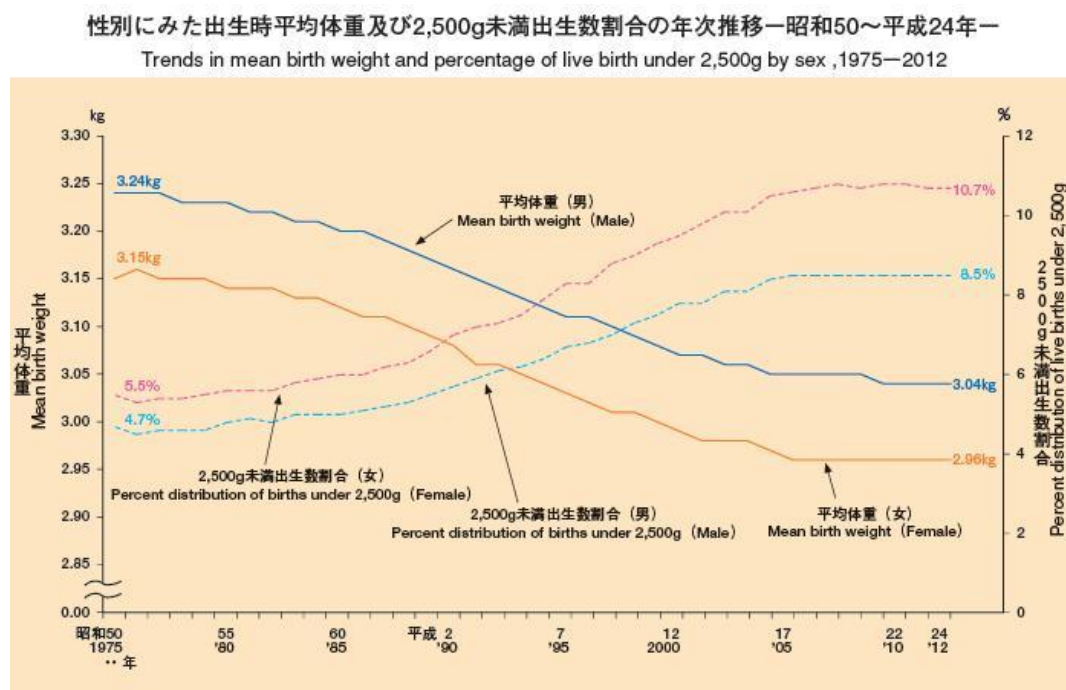


Figure 19: Mean birth weight<sup>43</sup>

One respondent told of having come away from a medical check-up almost in tears due to the doctor's insistence that she was gaining far too much weight and that she would have too big a baby and consequently a difficult birth. Almost echoing the Grasshopper manual referenced at the start of the chapter, wherein 'a difficult birth' is the direct consequence of 'bad' conduct, placing the responsibility for the well-being of the infant squarely in the hands of the mother.

### 5.1.2 Mother's well-being

A good mother is a relaxed mother, I was told repeatedly. *If, while the baby is in the belly, the mother has a smile on her face and is generally relaxed then a calm, understanding baby will be born. If the mother is constantly angry and frustrated then that's the type of baby she'll have*, said (PE20), a 52-year-old. A 32-year-old similarly emphasised: *If you're constantly stressed and anxious during the pregnancy then the child will be born with a nervous disposition* (PE10). Young women with very little knowledge pertaining to

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hw/vs01.html>

pregnancy and little or no experience thereof, invariably 'knew' of the strong influence the mothers-to-be exert on their unborn infants, with some referencing music and all indicating that calm, laid back and even happy mother led to a happy and healthy child. *Genki mother is the most important thing of all* (PE15). *If the mother is frustrated or irritated it will be transmitted to the child, so if the mother cries then the child will become a crybaby, if the mother panics then the baby will be afraid* (PE05).

There is considerable pressure on the mother to perform well, to be a calm, happy presence, not letting anything irritate her while imbibing high culture and listening to classical music. When (PE14) gave birth to an underweight child she expressed her worries that it had been her stressing that had caused her baby to be so small.

Traditional belief tells of pregnant women being scared of a fire and the child subsequently bearing a mark, often a birthmark, an element coined by Marika Mikkor as 'startling effects', as used to describe one of the main dangers to the unborn child whilst still in the womb, according to folk belief. Finding explanations for such things as physical deformity or mental disability was difficult before the age of modern science, and the various explanations people came up with are recounted in numerous references. If a woman were frightened, it would often leave a mark on the child, reflecting either what had frightened her or where she had first touched herself afterwards. *I was told by my great grandmother that looking at cooking fire was fine, but looking at a big fire or something burning would leave a mark on the child* (PE22). *If the mother becomes very scared, is very frightened upon seeing something scary or ugly this will cause the child distress and it will be born with a birthmark. So the mother should not watch scary movies, avoid anything gory as much as possible.*(PE03). When I asked what women should avoid doing during pregnancy, *it is said they should not look at fire or the child will have a birthmark and not go to shrine. A shrine is a sacred place, whilst death is the black pollution, birth is the red pollution, blood pollution, so towards the birth they were unwelcome. It was said families with pregnant women were not supposed to enter the shrine. I don't think it's so much now, maybe only grandmothers*

*and grandfathers who worry about old customs. I don't think you'll hear the word unclean (kegare) from anyone young (PE05).*

The child whilst in uterus is vulnerable, it needs to be protected from negative outside forces. *It is not good for a pregnant woman to take the bike, or to run, or to carry heavy objects. I think the action affects the lower abdomen forcefully, and that's not good since it can contact the uterus (PE16).*

### **5.1.3 Cleaning of the toilet**

The toilet culture of Japan is a very interesting one, highly polluting places of dirtiness whilst at the same possessing religious overtones. Upon entering a modern toilet the visitor is met with plastic slippers which are meant to be worn whilst in the toilet and never to be worn anywhere else. Failing to do so will be noticed and reacted harshly to. The bathroom and the toilet are separate rooms and during discussions Japanese people often express shock and distaste for the European norm of having both in the same room. The purifying and the polluting existing in one space. Therefore it is slightly surprising that one of the most often cited magico-religious beliefs pertaining to pregnancy is that of the importance of keeping a well cleaned bathroom. One theorized reason for this dichotomy lay in the fact that even though the toilets were dark and dirty, the waste was needed for its fertilizing element. Thus the toilet god *kawayu kami* was believed to reside in the toilet and protect the family whilst granting fertility (Hanley, 1997: 123). As the god of the toilet was believed to be very beautiful, keeping the toilet well cleaned would result in a beautiful child being born, one with a high nose and dimples, whilst a badly kept toilet would produce an ugly offspring who would experience an unhappy life. Only one respondent was aware or expressed knowledge as to the toilet deity. *Sometimes it is said that toilet deity and the deity protecting children is the same. So you may have heard there is a positive impact on the child if the mother takes good care of the toilet, and children, grow worse if you do not cherish the toilet. It is the god of furnace and toilet ... that's why you mark the infant with soot (PE05).*



The precise effect varied between respondents. The most commonly cited one though was being that of granting the child beauty, although personality, intelligence and wealth also entered into the picture. *It used to be said that a fair skinned child was good, so it was said that in order to bear a fair skinned child one should diligently clean the toilet (PE10). I heard that if you clean the toilet well then you'll have a beautiful child, (laughter). I was a slob and didn't. But I find it hard to believe. I also heard that if you ate abalone the child would have beautiful eyes.* Respondent PE12 had heard that keeping the toilet spotless would lead to an easy delivery. Some even had multiple magical qualities: *I heard that if you clean the toilet well you'll have a girl, or a beautiful child, or a child born with a good personality (PE17). Apparently these days they say "an unclean toilet doesn't invite wealth" (PE14). When you clean the toilet you also clean your body and mind (PE18).*

An 85-year-old respondent—known for non-adherence to tradition, much to the chagrin of her daughter who as a result slightly overcompensated—emphatically said that *pregnant women do not clean the toilet*, then she amended and said *this isn't practised here (Akita)*. When I further probed with the belief of it affecting the child she chuckled and pointed out it was *nothing but superstition (PE21)*.

One respondent came up with a scientific explanation for how cleaning the toilet would positively affect the foetus. *When you clean the toilet thoroughly a beautiful child will be born, a cute child will be born?* (the first said with affirmation the latter in a questioning tone). *I've heard this, so when you are pregnant you should really clean the bathroom well. This applies to Japanese bathroom, you know? You have to bend down and really work at it like this (movement) You have to bend your legs, just like this. It is quite the exercise, inside the belly the child is experiencing the exercise and therefore it becomes beautiful. Also you are making something dirty into something clean <sup>44</sup>/beautiful and therefore a cute beautiful child will be born, it's kind of a ritual. It's a kind of ritual here in Japan (PE03).*

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<sup>44</sup> The word *kirei* in Japanese means both beautiful as well as clean

Perhaps the most descriptive response and most in keeping with Japanese religiosity was *I didn't believe in it, but I didn't dare but clean the toilet very well during my pregnancy* (PE13).

#### **5.1.4. Yakudoshi – The Calamitous years**

As previously discussed (Section 3.2.1) the calamitous years, the *yakudoshi*, are a period of liminality for anyone within that age group. They are perceived as being more likely to have accidents befall them, more likely to fall ill and stand a greater chance of contracting any bad luck there is out there. Therefore the question arises what effect if any does this have upon the child were a woman fall to pregnant in her calamitous year. A 32-year-old mother of one had a clear opinion of this as she said that having a child would cleanse the woman of any misfortune, and along with this she performed a downward swoosh motion with her hands, indicating the natural way in which ill luck would flow out. Which was seconded by (PE03), that birthing makes the ill luck flow out.

After having said that the mother being in her unlucky year was irrelevant, her friend contradicted, saying that it flowed and that at the time of evil it would produce a boy (PE04). *I was pregnant in my unlucky year, but I was told that the bad luck turned to good because of the fall (that the bad luck flowed away) and that it was good for everyone around me.* Her husband interjected that they'd been to get exorcised on the 1st of January in order to rid her of the negative energy but found out soon after that she was pregnant (PE12). A young woman who hadn't borne children herself and had little knowledge of rituals and traditions recognized this though, saying *I don't think it matters too much if the mother is in her unlucky year, at least not if she gets the exorcism* (PE18), while 48- and 52-year-old respondents informed me of the basic fact that *when you give birth in your unlucky year it's a good thing* (PE19, 20). A 70-year-old respondent in Akita told me *I think it was something people said a long time ago, that giving birth in yakudoshi was bad. But I don't think it's strong today* (PE25). Shortly later in our conversation she told me she had in fact gone to get exorcised.

However not everyone believed it to be a good thing to get pregnant during *yakudoshi*. *It's not good for the body of the mother to become pregnant in Yakudoshi. She's much more likely to become sick, have an accident (PE07). Yakudoshi – People who are overly concerned about such things might not want to become pregnant during their yakudoshi. So you think it's to be avoided? I didn't believe in the inauspicious years at first, but my year was not a good year, a lot of things happened. I don't wish to believe it but it is curious. People who worry about the yakudoshi go to be exorcised at the shrine on new years. I didn't really believe but I went to the exorcism. (PE10).*

## **5.2 Praying for easy delivery**

Praying for the health of the child as well as easy delivery seems culturally ingrained, praying to more gods makes sense rather than limiting yourself, thus praying both at a temple and a shrine is very common. If a shrine or temple is renowned for being especially good at granting particular wishes then people will travel.

### **5.2.1 The *obi-iwai***

The *obi-iwai* [帯祝い]<sup>45</sup> is the name given to the ritual wrapping of a maternity sash, *hara obi* [腹帯]<sup>46</sup>, around the growing midsection of the mother-to-be. By far the biggest and most well known of all the rituals, the practice was recognized by all respondents and practiced by the overwhelming majority of those who had borne children. Those who had not practiced it had done so for specific reasons which tended to be explained in detail. Variations in the importance and way in which it was exercised were however notable and will be discussed below. All were nevertheless in agreement that it should preferably be donned on the Day of the Dog, *inu no hi* [戌の日], in the fifth month of pregnancy, and all those responding in the

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<sup>45</sup> Also known as *Chakutai iwai*

<sup>46</sup> Also referred to as *iwata-obi*[岩田帯] or *fukutai*[腹帯]

Tokyo area specifically mentioned Suitengu shrine<sup>47</sup> as the place to obtain the sash.

The sash itself is a bleached plain white cotton sash (occasionally red), anywhere from 3 to 9 metres in length, although 3~4 metres seems to be the norm, and as shall be demonstrated, not only possesses practical qualities but also talismanic as well as ritual ones. The sash is then wound around the mother-to-be, often with the assistance of family, her mother or mother-in-law.

The fifth month, as was discussed above, is when the pregnancy is considered safe, stable. Physically and naturally, a large portion of pregnancies in general abort naturally before this time, hence once entered into the fifth month it becomes official, the mother starts to show signs of her pregnancy and becomes officially pregnant. This is celebrated by the *obi iwai*. The late timing may strike Brits or Icelanders strange, but the difference lies in part in the way in which pregnancy weeks are counted, as mentioned earlier. Whilst the general rule of thumb in Britain and Iceland is to wait until the end of the first trimester before announcing, the end of the first trimester corresponds roughly to the end of the fourth month by Japanese reckoning.

The first historical mention of the *hara-obi* is considered to be from the third century BC when empress Jin-gō (Jingu) is said to have “Forthwith, in order to restrain her august womb, she took a stone and wound it round the waist of her august skirt”<sup>48</sup>. The timing of the ritual is invariably the fifth month and already during the Heian period (794–1185) there is mention of the custom taking place in the fifth month of pregnancy (Yamashita, 2004: 102) indicating that the custom in many ways has continued in a very similar vein. In 1954 Norbeck describes the custom as a basic fact in his ethnography of a fishing village thus: “The Day of the Dog by the lunar calendar in the fifth month of pregnancy is *obitori-no-hi*, the day on which the abdominal band, a strip of white cloth about ten feet long, is first donned.” He then goes on to describe that it is normally the mother of the woman who obtains this and that the blessing of

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<sup>47</sup> 2-4-1, Nihombashi-Kakigaracho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

<sup>48</sup> Kojiki, Section XCVIII.—Emperor Chiū-Ai (Part IV.—The Empress Jin-Gō Conquers Korea)

Kannon along with an amulet of some sort is often obtained at the same time (Norbeck, 1954: 164). The custom seems to have remained similar until the present day (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 138; Ishiguro, 1984: 336; Hardacre, 1997: 23; Lebra, 1984: 171).

The sash is normally obtained at a shrine and often inscribed by a priest or even the woman's obstetrician in a manner particular to Japanese culture, blurring the line between the medical and the spiritual (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 182). The reason for which the Day of the Dog (*Inu no Hi*) is chosen is believed to be due to the ease with which dogs generally whelp, thus images of dogs abound in relation to the occasion (Reader, 1991: 31). The Day of the Dog is a further elaboration on the Japanese calendar system which was in use up until the advent of the Gregorian calendar in 1873, wherein each of the 12 animal signs is assigned a year and then over that year each day is assigned to one of the animals so it runs on a 12 day rotation resulting in the Day of the Dog occurring every 12 days (Hagin-Mayer, 1989: 142). In addition to this there is an additional 6-day rotational system, also based on the lunar calendar referred to as *Rokuyo* [六曜] which defines days as either being considered auspicious or inauspicious. Auspicious days are called *Taian* [大安] and it is considered especially felicitous to seek a pregnancy blessing when the Day of the Dog lands on an auspicious day. For this purpose companies, magazines and shrines publish tables making it easier for the mother to fathom which day is the most auspicious one for her. This also results in near traffic jams when the Day of the Dog lands on an auspicious day and in particular when it also happens to be a weekend.



Figure 20: Families queuing up for a blessing at  
Suitengu Shrine on an auspicious day



Figure 21: The writing of a blessing on the sash at  
Suitengu Shrine

Not everyone is aware of whether a certain day is an auspicious day or not so the shrines and temples publish a specific calendar highlighting the Day of the Dog, and adding a particular attention to the days when it lands on an auspicious day.



Figure 22: Calendar for the day of the Dog

The sash is supposed to protect from both cold and shock (Yanagisawa, 2009: 88) and from winter chills and sweat (Ohnuki Tierne, 1984: 181–184). The proposed function of the hara obi has changed over time, as can be seen in Ogata Masakiyo's thesis from 1891, where he

claimed the use of the sash as a way of securing correct foetal positioning as well as a manner in which to control foetal growth to be outdated, but that its main function was that of support and in order to keep warm (Ogata, 1891).

To most it was an important part of the pregnancy, but many expressed that they had donned it for their mothers or mother-in-law, because it was necessary or right and then quickly changed to an elastic one once the mother was away. The ritual allows for family members, often living far apart, to be a part of the process. Although not a new tradition *per se*, its current revival and popularity has caused it to be branded by some a concocted ‘necessity’, although Lebra has argued that the fact that it proves so popular must in some way reflect the need for a ritual at that point, the social acknowledgement of pregnancy (Lebra, 1984: 171). Which is exactly what it is, it is at this moment that the woman becomes officially a *ninpu*, a pregnant woman. She has survived the precarious first stage thus one threshold has been crossed. Tsipy Ivry also reported from her visits to maternity classes that upon donning the *hara obi* the women felt they fully realised they were pregnant (Ivry, 2010: 154).

As Amanda Seaman has noted, there exists a perceivable paradox wherein the modern day ‘mommy economy’ involving expensive goods marketed for parents willing to spend considerable amounts on what will perhaps be their only child, are displayed next to both traditional maternity sashes as well as the more modern day variants (Seaman, 2009: 50).

Although seemingly largely commercialized today aside from its provenance, the element of tradition and religious observance appears in the multitude of maternity handbooks and sites which carefully explain the proper manner in which the no longer needed maternity sash is to be discarded. Interestingly enough often combining modern day attitudes towards recycling and the environment with ritualistic traditions. It is to either be used for clothing for the infant or to be returned to the shrine for disposal by fire. Thus, even though it is accompanied by a talisman upon purchase the sash itself serves a talismanic role alongside the social one.

Although most go to a shrine, not all do, as an Akita respondent described: *I wore the hara-obi but I didn't go to the shrine. On the Day of the Dog in the fifth month you wrap the hara-obi. Even if it isn't on the Day of the Dog you still wrap yourself around that time.*

G: Where did you get the hara-obi?

*In my case the hara-obi was new and I did it properly. First time, with the oldest, I wound the long (emphasis) unbleached cotton sash around me (sarashi), however the second one ... she makes a stretching motion and laughs ...*

Her last remark indicated that instead of donning the traditional sash she opted for an easier girdle with elasticity .. later she continued.

G: Who assisted you?

*Grandmother (her mother), but when I was pregnant with my oldest one I was so small around the waist that it kept falling. It kept falling.<sup>49</sup> Yet she persevered. She emphasised that the event landing on the Day of the Dog was not of primary importance (PE01). It both warms the belly as well as lifts it (PE01).*

When asked if previous generations had practised going to the shrine for the wrapping of the obi, she said *I don't think they went. In the old days pregnancy was a dirty thing, therefore they retreated to the koya for birthing, a separate place where they gave birth on straw mats. They were not supposed to be under the sun.* She asked if I knew the term kegare. *Pregnant women were thought of as being polluted..* G: All through the pregnancy? *No, from the time of birth for 21 days. They were dirty things. Once the child was born the husband could not go fishing. Modern day people don't worry about this. I'm not sure about farming people (PE01).*

*I don't have the omamori I got that day anymore, and I didn't throw it away because it's not good if you dispose of it inappropriately. I went back to the shrine with my husband and returned it (PE10).*

*I used the haraobi only one day. It was hard work winding the sash properly and it was*

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<sup>49</sup> PE01 58-year-old mother of 3 from Akita



*also painful. So I only wound it on the day we went to the shrine in order to get the blessing and to celebrate. The rest of the time I used a simple waist cinch which I bought (PE10).*

*My mother took me to a famous shrine in Osaka, not our local one, and there she got me the maternity sash and an amulet. Did your mother assist you? (laughing) I had no clue so I had to have the book in front of me in order to figure out how to wear it. You know the feeling was so good, it held me tight and I wore it throughout (PE11).*

*I used the maternity sash and then I made it into diapers. Her friend then asks incredulously: After you used it? Yes, after I'd finished using it, immediately after the birth. I wore it to diminish the size of the head. The friend again asks: So you cut it up? For diapers, yes. To which the friend then praises her for her hard work (PE04).*

*They said it wasn't good to let the belly cool down, so I used the haraobi. I went at 5 months to Meji shrine but not on the Day of the Dog because it was so crowded (PE12).*

*I didn't go to a shrine I just bought the maternity sash. I was able to put it on on my own and I liked it. It was nice not to shake (wobble). I also bought an elastic one. When I asked if it had changed her feelings at all: Oh yes, because you stand out more, I felt pregnant (PE14).*

Although most go to a shrine not everyone does. (PE16) expressed no outward signs of distress whilst she describes how they didn't go to a shrine, yet how she received plenty of talismans.

*I couldn't go to the shrine but my parents wrapped the sash around me and they went and prayed (PE19). I got the hara obi in the hospital and was wound at home on the Day of the Dog (PE29). I felt a change, I felt now I am properly pregnant and there are things I can't do (PE20).*

The recurring element of finally 'feeling pregnant' is noticeable, they are now officially a part of a select group, all of whom are liminal yet official.

An 85-year-old: *I did it at three months. So did you go to a shrine? I didn't go. Around here no one goes. Normal people didn't go. Now it may have changed (PE21).*

*I didn't don the haraobi, you know, I'm not really all that interested in those kind of things.*

*I received one from my parents but didn't use it (PE22). Didn't go to the shrine, but wound the maternity sash which she got from her mother on the Day of the Dog. Continued using it following the birth for support (PE22).*

*I went with my mother, I remember thinking that this is just superstition to me, but my mother went with me and she told me that whenever the baby had been safely born I had to return it to the shrine. But I didn't (laughter). I did it mostly for my mother and I only wore it once. It was a different shrine, not our local one, in a different ken (PE24).*

*I didn't go to the shrine. The mother of my husband went to the shrine, asked them to pray for me and the child and got me the maternity sash (PE25).*

*Wound the maternity sash but did not go to a shrine (PE26). ... wore the sash only once then I switched to an elastic one. Seems to be recurrent among the Akita responses that very few actually went to a shrine, they had the sash but just donned it at home.*

*One of my good friends in high school enjoys tradition and wished to wind the maternity sash. However neither her husband's mother nor her mother were very traditional and therefore didn't know how to wind it correctly. They went to a shrine close to where she was born (PE05). It is noticeable that the shrines catering to pregnant women unfailingly have information available online on how to exactly wind the sash and how to treat the other things received, the talisman and sometimes the *fuda*. When discussing the simpler elastic *haraobi* she exclaimed it was lazy (PE07, who went with her mother). She also mentioned that one of the reasons for using the *haraobi* was to stand out a little, to experience the feeling, to feel like a mother.*

*Only went to the shrine the first time but used the elastic *haraobi*, the young generation of *haraobi*. The reason being that the other kept slipping down and was troublesome (PE08).*

*Didn't want to go to the shrine with the second one as she didn't want the first child, born abroad, to feel left out of these traditions, so fairness trumped ritual (PE30).*

The *haraobi* is to avoid the baby becoming too big, to protect the baby and for easy delivery. In a 1985 survey, out of 100 people, 96 people used *haraobi*, and the reason given,

if they had used it, was that it feels uncomfortable not doing it, or going to get cold, provides support (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 17). The doctors recommend wearing the *haraobi*, to the point of some hospitals actually distributing them. There is also pressure on women to keep weight gain down to a minimum so as to keep the child's size down.

### **5.3 Three shrines for the Day of the Dog**

In order to better conceptualize the pregnant woman's shrine visiting experience it is of interest to note a few of the similarities and differences between three different places of worship, all of which featured prominently in both questionnaire responses as well as the interviews. The shrines and temple are all famous for catering especially to pregnant women, yet their history and theological background is considerably different. One 50-year-old explained the reason for going to the local shrine as being due to her husband being the eldest son and therefore duty bound to go to their local shrine (PE17).

#### **5.3.1 Suitengu Tokyo**

As lightly touched upon above, Suitengu shrine [水天宮] in Tokyo was by far the most often cited shrine in connection with *inu no hi* or 'Day of the Dog'. Situated near a subway line in Tokyo it draws huge crowds on weekends, particularly when the Day of the Dog happens to land upon a weekend.<sup>50</sup>

One of 25 such shrines of the same name in Japan, Suiten-gū is devoted to conception and safe childbirth. Suiten-gū was first established in 1818 in Edo by the ninth daimyo of the Kurume. In 1871, the Arima family moved from Mita to Akasaka, taking the shrine with it, and in the following year they moved the shrine to its present location. As the couples approach there are numerous vendors selling dog- or fertility-related sweets along the way, and representatives from the major pregnancy and infancy wares and magazines line the street

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<sup>50</sup> 2-4-1 Nihonbashi-Kakigarachō, Chūō, Tokyo 103-0014 Official Home page <http://www.suitengu.or.jp/>

greeting guests with presents of bags filled with promotional wares. On an auspicious day the queues line up around the block and glove-clad security men let people into the grounds little by little. Once inside, there is a square filled with stalls offering talismans specifically designed according to your wishes, ladies sell first wraps for infants and amidst it all there are couples posing with their parents or children for photographs, others waiting in line so as to obtain a blessing or waiting in line in order to have the *haraobi* inscribed by one of the shrine representatives. There beside the entrance to the shrine is a statue of a mother dog and its pup, gleaming due to all the times their heads have been stroked for good luck. Around them the symbols for the various animals of the animal cycle, also meant to be stroked for good luck. The theme continues with a statue of a mother *kappa*<sup>51</sup> with its younglings climbing all over her. Everywhere people are taking photographs, buying talismans and wares, and there is a sense of joy about the place.

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<sup>51</sup> A water sprite often known for its devious and sometimes murdering ways, yet in later years it has been commercialized so as to be deemed ‘cute’.



Figure 23: Stroking the head of dog for luck,  
*Suitengu*



Figure 24: waiting to obtain blessings on the  
maternity sash at *Suitengu*



Figure 25: Lady selling non denominational  
*omamori*



Figure 26: Posing in front of *Suitengu*

There is a certain sense of commercialism abounding, with all the stalls, the stores lining the route and all the representatives for the various maternity magazines and catalogues.

### 5.3.2 Onmesama in Kamakura

Daikōji temple, or Onmesama as it has now become famous, is a temple located centrally in the historical township of Kamakura, highlighting the contrast between the traditional and the new. Legend has it that during the mid-Kamakura period (1185-1333), Priest Nitto encountered the ghost of a mother with her infant, and through reading her sutras managed to grant her peace of mind. Subsequently the ghost of the lady which had been terrorizing the neighbourhood, seeing as all those who saw her fell ill, disappeared along with her infant, thus granting the temple special powers of safe delivery. Unlike *Suitengu* this is a more quiet,

introspective place. In order to obtain a maternity sash visitors line up outside a small shed, entering one person at a time into this darkened small outhouse wherein sits a little old lady who takes down the name, age and length of pregnancy for the priest to pray for. Then a 2000 yen donation is suggested after which the parents to be are regaled with a packet containing maternity sash and a talisman.



Figure 27: Onmeisama



Figure 28: The dog King

### 5.3.3 InuJinja Nagoya

The last shrine<sup>52</sup> dates back to the year 673, and is representative of the dog, as it is officially a dog shrine. According to the tales there was once severe flooding in the area, a *yamabushi* priest came to the villagers' assistance and fashioning a ritual wand he prayed above it and placed it near the river. Subsequently the floods ceased. However, the following year a group of curious farmers opened the wand, finding therein pictures of dogs as well as the words *Inu no O*, or King of the Dogs<sup>53</sup>. And of course the flooding recommenced. To appease the gods they were guided to build a shrine in that same spot, and since then there have been no floods. The association with dogs leads it to automatically become a shrine to cater to pregnant women due to the aforementioned association with ease of birth, although the shrine is also home to the deity *Inuhime no Kami*<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Official site <http://www.inu-jinja.or.jp/yuisho/>

<sup>53</sup> 犬の王

<sup>54</sup> 伊奴姫神





Figure 29: Ema displaying the Dog king



Figure 30: A blurb on the shrine featured in a mothering mmagazine

Unfortunately I did not manage to attend this shrine on the Day of the Dog, so the perception was that of a quiet haven, yet I was assured by the priest that the shrine was very well sought. He also very proudly shared with me a blurb on the shrine which had appeared recently in a popular pregnancy magazine.

## 5.4. Guessing the gender

Once the maternity sash has been donned the mother-to-be becomes visibly pregnant, she is now officially pregnant. Along with this change come further changes in people's demeanour and attitude towards her. This is when aunts and neighbours start sharing (often unwanted) stories of pregnancy mishaps and triumphs, when the woman starts to have people stand up for her on buses, she begins to be protected by society. She is both of an elevated status as well as belonging to the community, she needs to be protected seeing as she is neither here nor there and the child will hopefully become a member of the community. Along with this comes also a change in people's perception of the personal space of the mother-to-be, with a number of women exclaiming irritation at people touching the bump

without first asking for permission, or as PE12 phrased it: *as if I didn't own myself anymore*.

The guessing game is a part of this process, when random people start to assert that the woman is either carrying a boy or a girl based upon a number of tell tale 'signs'. These interactions allow the community to participate in the pregnancy, to share share knowledge and absolutes and to be active agents.

These signs can be a multitude of different elements, the form of the baby bump is one of the more predominantly referenced one. Almost everyone had heard of the being able to detect the gender of the infant by the shape of the belly; however, equally often, people were not sure which it was (PE17) and then the group was almost equally divided in regards to whether a front bump meant a girl or vice versa. *Back in my day*, expressed a 68-year-old from Akita, *a girl bump was forward and pointy then it was a girl, but if it went to the sides then it was a boy. This was however hardly ever right, but it had remained the same from ancient times* (PE1). A questionnaire respondent responded almost exactly opposite: *if your belly is big straight and out then it's a boy, and if the belly is big and flat then it's a girl*. In two instances as I was interviewing a person whilst others were in the room, the respondent said one thing, then queried the room and ended up asserting the exact opposite.

However all respondents who mentioned the face agreed that if the mother's face becomes sharp and hard then it's a boy, but if it becomes round and gentle then it's a girl. This statement was very often followed by the action of pulling the eyes up so as to make the face outward slanted.

*If the mothers face became kind and gentle then she bore a girl, but intense and harsh if she bore a boy* (PE1). *Couldn't remember which one it was but that mother's face became tight, or stern with one of the genders* (PE05), while (PE27) asserted that if the face and the belly are sharp, then it's a boy. *Pregnant with a boy face becomes tight* (PE07, 08, 09).

Aside from the lay of the belly, respondent (PE12) added that if the mother becomes easily irritated then she is in all likelihood carrying a male child. A 22-year-old asserted that if the mother is carrying a girl, the father to be will be happy, and if it's the reverse then the mother



will be happy throughout the pregnancy. I guess it is true (laughter) (PE15). Meanwhile (PE22) shared that she *heard that if the morning sickness is very bad then it's a girl, but then I gave birth to a boy so it didn't matter*, yet (PE25) points out the opposite, that *If the morning sickness is heavy then you're carrying a male child, if it's light then it's a girl*. Slightly echoing a questionnaire answer wherein the idea is that male and female blood does not mix and thus a woman carrying a male child will be more bloated and discoloured.

## **5.5 Couvade - Babyshowers**

Amongst those interviewed, only one had heard of the father gaining weight or in other ways becoming pregnant with the woman. However when later the discussion came to morning sickness, two women mentioned the father having developed morning sickness. One woman mentioned that although she was always vehemently and constantly sick during all three pregnancies, the middle one, when she bore a girl and the father started having morning sickness as well, was moderately milder than the others.

Couvade .. *well, when I was pregnant.. when the woman becomes pregnant the father becomes ill*. I asked if she'd heard about this and she said she'd heard of it elsewhere. However it really happened to her, as when she was pregnant the father became sick (laughter): *it was very strange, very strange but this happened to us, and when father was sick mother was a little bit less sick* (PE01).

*My husband experienced morning sickness with me* (PE20).

## **5.6 Returning to the family home**

One of the more pervasive traditions, known to all respondents and practised by the large majority of those who had borne children, was that of *Satogaeri* [里帰り], the practice of returning to one's natal family home to give birth (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984: 187; Yanagita, 1951: 238-239).

This tradition is an element of a support system within Japanese society aimed at relieving the stresses surrounding the birth. The previously mentioned maternal handbook, *boshi techō*,

to a certain extent assists with this, as all pertinent data is carefully recorded and easily transportable.

## **5.7 Chapter review**

It is interesting to note the amount of emphasis is placed on the woman bearing responsibility for the child until it is born. She is made responsible for not only the physical but also the psychological well being of the infant, her moods supposedly influencing the foetal development.

Ideas of uncleanliness and the pollution of pregnancy seem minimal, replaced by an intensive responsibility on behalf of the mother in regards to the well-being of her child through minding what she eats and comporting herself properly. The child should be foremost in her mind at all times, with one mother expressing her guilt over her perceived fault inasmuch as her eating fast food during the pregnancy caused her daughter to love it (PE14).

The maternity sash seems to serve at least three functions. Once donned the women expressed that they finally 'felt' like they were pregnant. And the magic is that although all bought the traditional sash, there was no stigma attached to using the elastic one. Interesting though is how adamant they are about wearing the sash as very few of them showed to any degree so there does not seem to be a physical need for most of them to wear the sash. Which leaves the socio-cultural reason for wearing it. The sash brings together generations, as it is one of the few places a mother-in-law can assert her authority, and many of the respondents exclaimed that being bound by their mother or mother-in-law brought them closer. It serves as a connective element between the generations. It is also a talismanic religious object, awarding security and perceived protection.

The pregnant woman's liminal nature is also presented in their dietary restrictions, inasmuch as they are now vulnerable to 'outside' food, while 'inside food' is preferable. The mother-to-be is now officially outside, no longer just a young woman and she has added responsibilities and expectations. She is a mother-to-be, and as long as she conforms to the

role she will be protected by society.

So, the mother-to-be is faced with the expectation that she is supposed to be calm, artistic, unruffled, all the while cleaning the bathroom and having gained almost no weight.

## Chapter 6: Birthing

The actual child birth is physically the culmination of the childbearing process, a time of inherent danger to both mother and child. It was historically also very important to the young woman as often the bride was not officially registered with the husband's family until after she had demonstrated her fertility. She was a borrowed womb, highlighting the insignificance of the mother (Bernstein, 1982: 101).

Anthropologist Dana Raphale coined the phrase 'matrescence' to describe the process of becoming a mother:

The critical transition period which has been missed is MATRESCENCE, the time of mother becoming, the period when a woman changes from girl and wife to mother. During this process, this rite de passage, changes occur in a woman's physical state, in her status within the group, in her emotional life, in her focus of daily activity, in her own identity, and in her relationships with all those around her. .... The Physiological stage of MATRESCENCE begins at the moment a female delivers a live infant. But, human beings are never limited by biological fact! (Raphael, 1975: 66)<sup>55</sup>

Much has been written within feminist studies on birthing as a ritual and frequently as a technocratic one. Robbie Davis-Floyd in particular has argued for the inherent loss of control the mother experiences when all power of control is forcibly removed from her as she is de personified under a sheet in an unnatural position (1992). Deborah Fiedler however has argued that "In Japan a prevailing cultural view of birth as a natural and healthy event places a value on using the least possible amount of obstetrical intervention in the birthing process" (Fiedler, 1996: 195). Rika Houston seconds this, arguing that the accepted consumption of full meals throughout the labour ritually "acknowledges the assumption that birth is not only a natural process, but also that women are quite capable of performing this process." ... "the assumption is that everything will progress normally" (Houston, 1999). Thus rather than to make it into a pathological event it is perceived well within the power of the mother-to-be to

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<sup>55</sup> Capitalisation from original text

overcome.<sup>56</sup>

Arguing the point that animals in general give birth with ease, Kojima Naoyoshi said in the 17th century "That humanity should be inferior to the birds and the beasts is an extraordinary thing ... [this is because] people turn their back on nature and make use of their own knowledge" (referenced in Burns, 2002: 200), indicating that we have lost the capacity for giving birth in an easy manner, that we associate it with pain. This maternal responsibility for the birth is evident in the stoicism expected as well as the mother's behaviour throughout pregnancy, the idea that the child can relatively easily be influenced by the mother's actions or inactions (Ivry, 2007: 25; Burns, 2002: 186).

Statistical data shows that infant mortality in Japan is extremely low, as is death of the mother.<sup>57</sup> Suggestions have been made that this is in part due to the intensive monitoring during pregnancy and Nakamura has argued that the *Boshi Techō*, the maternal handbook is a large contributing factor in the low infant mortality level (Nakamura, 2010). The fact that the mothers themselves look after and bear responsibility for the handbook shows that considerable agential participation is entrusted to the mothers-to-be, whilst in many countries mothers only have access to their medical charts on the obstetricians authority.<sup>58</sup>

Although the women had been very forthcoming up until this part of the interview, there was suddenly an added element of the private when asked about their experiences during birth, with their answers tending towards the curt, emphasising that they did their best. This element of the private was also reported by Ella Lury Wiswell in the 1930s when she attempted to gain access and information about birthing "Shoko thinks I will not be able to see a delivery because people are so shy, and it is a very private thing". She did however later gain access (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 99).

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<sup>56</sup> Houston frequently wonders about labouring women being 'allowed' to eat as a contrast to the 'norm' as perceived by her. Highlighting her North American experiences colouring her perceptions.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hw/vs01.html> The data show an astounding decline from the 1950's and until now.

<sup>58</sup> In Iceland, years after the birth of my first child and with the freedom of information act declaring all medical documents open to the individual, I could only read my file under the supervision of a nurse and in the storage room.

A bride was not officially registered with the husband's family until after she had demonstrated her fertility (Bernstein, 1982: 101). After giving birth she did not necessarily supervise the upbringing, bathing, disciplining or preparing meals, often performed by the paternal grandmother (Bernstein, 1982: 102). A borrowed womb indicates the personal insignificance of the mother.

## **6.1 Historical context**

A woman's first pregnancy was traditionally seen as a rite binding her to her midwife (Hardacre, 1997: 22). The terms for 'midwife' are loaded, as the different terms have political and historical connotations. The term *sanba* derives from the 1920s state move to improve public health by establishing licensed midwives rather than the traditional *toriagebāsan*, as they were previously known (Hardacre, 1997: 48). This move was mostly accomplished by 1945. According to Hardacre, the new *sanba* with their scientific education, de-ritualised pregnancy and birth, an opinion echoed in the biography of Ei (Hardacre, 1997: 49; Ochiai, 1999: 254). In 1949 there was yet another re-organisation of midwives, with their title becoming *josanpu*, a meaning closer to maternity nurse, and indicative of their status being more that of an assistant to the doctors, who possessed the actual knowledge.

In 1955 the number of births taking place in hospitals or clinics was only 17.6%; 82.4% of all births were delivered at home. In sharp contrast, in 1989, over 99.9% of all births in Japan took place in a hospital (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 38).

In 1914, the number of medically trained midwives superseded untrained ones for the first time since the midwives ordinance of 1899 (Homei, 2006: 421) and more importantly "medical midwifery came to be perceived as respectable and pertinent for girls from every background". Up until then the profession had been perceived as tainted by the polluting element of birthing, as well as the blood.

### 6.1.1 Pollution

Even today, general ideas of women as polluting survive. Emiko Namihira gives examples on large-scale construction sites such as tunnels and dams (Namihira, 1987: s67).<sup>59</sup> Birthing, however, was believed to be particularly polluting, so much so that among the beliefs associated with the post-partum period, the woman was not to go outside for a month without some sort of head cover so as to not pollute the goddess Amaterasu (Norbeck, 1952: 273). Interestingly, Yanagita collected a folktale which contradicts this, wherein a goddess tests the charity of wayfaring brothers and the brother not afraid of the blood pollution is rewarded.<sup>60</sup> The family fire was perceived as being polluted, so much so that women at times did not share a hearth with the rest of the family, water could also get polluted. A 33-year-old respondent informed me that *For 21 days you should not leave the house and even after that you're not supposed to put your hands in water*. She also mentioned that during menstruation she as a rule doesn't go to shrines (PE26).

The place of birth was believed to be particularly polluting as will be shown in the next chapter, but everything connected with the birth itself also bore the negative effect. In the account of Saitō Ei's life as a midwife in the first half of the 1900s, by Emiko Ochiai, Saitō discusses her own distaste for the smell of childbirth and the dirtiness surrounding childbirth. She also points out that even then a midwife's job was considered a dishonourable position owing to its association with blood, and hence the religious impurity (Ochiai, 1999: 251). Yet the midwives role was also religious in nature as she was perceived to guide the child's spirit from the gods and into this world (Yanagisawa, 2009: 88).

These ideas are not only from the distant past, as a 68-year-old respondent from Akita told me that *Traditionally women gave birth in a separate house, but that was long ago. Only*

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<sup>59</sup> I myself experienced causing a ruckus when as a high school student I visited a large tunnel site in northern Japan in 1992, whereupon some of the workers objected heavily to me entering.

<sup>60</sup> Legend transmitted in the village of Shiiba in southern Kyūshū, the mountain goddess appears in the form of a helpless maiden who tests the character of hunters. It is said that there were two brothers, the older, Oma, who was heartless, and the younger brother, Koma, noted for his compassion. One day when these brothers had gone hunting in the mountain they met a maiden who had just given birth to a child and who asked for food. The older brother, being afraid of the impurity of blood, ignored her request, whereas the younger brother out of compassion offered his own lunch basket, whereupon the maiden, who in reality was the Divine Mother of the Mountain (Yama-no-Shinbo), promised success and happiness to the younger brother. Kunio Yanagita, *Nochi no Kari-kotoba no Ki* (on hunting traditions) (Tokyo, 1908, 1951).

women and the midwife were allowed to enter the room because it was polluted. People would say, for instance that if a craftsman fixing the roof fell down and his wife had just borne a child that he had fallen because of the impurity of birth. Also, when you had to go to the toilet (which was outside) you had to take an umbrella for fear of polluting the god of the sun<sup>61</sup> (PE23). So the separate birthing house is perceived as in the past whereas the pollutive element is much more current.

A professed Christian aged 41, also told me that *When unclean, such as at menstruation, you shouldn't touch the water and for a month after birth you shouldn't go out, shouldn't get cold.* So there is still the idea of impurity or is this from long ago? I asked. *I know people who even now don't go to a shrine when they are unclean. I do not go at the time of menstruation* (PE03).

Both accounts show an awareness of the polluting element of blood among young, well educated women.

In spite of the polluting element of the birth itself, the woman and child were still at the mercy of outside forces and as such the woman had to be careful not to face north whilst birthing, the direction whence evil originates (Smith & Cornell, 1956).

The water used for cleaning after the birth was also perceived as polluting. Thus Bernstein recounts that it was poured in a shady place (Bernstein, 1982: 106; Smith and Cornell 191956: 70) while Norbeck observed the water being poured into a hole dug under the floor in the room where the delivery took place, a room with an elevated floor often, where underneath soiled cloths were also placed in the hole and sometimes salt sprinkled over (Norbeck, 1952: 272).

Utsumi recounts considerable polluting element in the island community he researched:

Birth taboos.—A husband whose wife has given birth to a boy has to abstain from work for three days, and five days if the baby is a girl. The mother must avoid touching the house-altar (*kamidana*) for seventy-five days after delivery. If a birth happens on the last days of the year or at New Year, the pine-trees decorating the entrance-gate (*kadomatsu*), rice-Cake offerings and

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<sup>61</sup> お天道様



all decorations in and around the house are taken away (Utsumi, 1951).

Inoguchi describes the emphasis on the fire within a mountain community:

When a woman has given birth to a child, it is said that the fire goes out when somebody visits her house and comes near the hearth. Then people say: "Go bring *toppo* (bamboo tubes) from the grave!" These bamboo tubes, used for holding flowers on a grave, are exchanged for new ones every year; the old ones are thrown into the hearth as fuel. When doing so the extinguished fire begins to burn again (Inoguchi, 1951).

Contrastingly Namihira Emiko argues that the ancient texts do not actually mention birth pollution as such, merely that both the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* express the commandment of a man not looking at a woman as she is giving birth (Emiko, 1987: s68).

*You're not allowed to go to the shrine for 100 days after delivery (PE23). I've heard that you're not supposed to pass under the torii when someone in your family has died, but I've never heard of menstruation (PE23).*

### 6.1.2 Birthing huts

A much cited example of the polluting element of birthing in Japanese tradition is the existence of birthing huts, *ubuya*, [産屋] wherein the woman would be isolated during childbirth so as to keep the pollution contained.<sup>62</sup> These huts were generally small tent like structures with a thatched roof.

The map of the "Taboo on delivery" (*san no imi*) shows at least thirty-five villages across the country that at one time had *ubuya*. Most of these were located along the coast and on islands. Where no *ubuya per se* was found, however, other arrangements, such as giving birth in a separate building and not sharing meals, are recorded (Bunkacho, 1977: map 93). A student of Yanagita's, folklorist Segawa Kiyoko (1895–1984) indicated that birthing huts were ubiquitous. Dating from the latter part of Meiji era to the second decade of the Showa, childbirth huts were more numerous in southwestern than in northwestern Japan, and more

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<sup>62</sup> Other names were *Ubugoya*, *Tsuki-goya* monthly-house, *Taya* the other house, or rest house *hima-ya*

numerous along the coast than inland (Emiko, 1987: s68). Alongside the birthing huts, particularly in fishing villages, were the menstrual huts, where women retreated when they had menses, sometimes referred to as the *Taya*, the 'other house'.

Another theory was that whilst the women were in retreat they were hidden and consequently protected from the various ghosts and evil spirits which might seek them out (Yanagisawa, 2009: 88). Ijima mentioned that in some cases the birthing hut was, contrary to the above, considered sacred space and thus customary for the villagers to hang up the consecrating rope (*shimenawa*) adorned with the traditional cut paper (*shide*) which frequently adorn Shinto shrines. This is echoed in Hitomi Tonomura, who argues that historically, citing the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, there is no indication that the act of birthing was polluted, but that looking upon it was taboo (Ijima, 1986: 167; Tonomura, 2007: 9). The Oubara *ubuya*, in spite of being tiny, has an information plaque for visitors where it is described as having been a haven of rest for the new mother, a sacred place where the deity could descend into the hut upon the birth. This *Ubuya* was in use until the Taisho era (1912–1926) (Tonomura, 2007: 4). In a similar timeframe, the Kyoto *Ubuya* was in use until the beginning of the Taisho era (1912–1926) (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000).

Tonomura would argue that the huts were usually associated with pollution but not necessarily misery, as they provided relief from various duties as well as often having the company of other women (Tonomura: 2007: 13). Likewise *Ubuya* according to Yanagisawa were places of rest for women, where they were exempt from house chores and working in the fields, and could concentrate wholly upon the child. She cites instances of older women recounting stories of happy times therein (Yanagisawa, 2009: 88). A 70-year-old respondent informed me that *Used to be that women would give birth in a place of isolation upon straw*. When I asked how long ago: *I think it's before 1939* (PE25).

However, not nearly all births occurred in the *ubuya*. Most occurred in the home, with some considerations. Women commonly seem to have given birth in the darkest, dirtiest and least used room in the house (Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 106; Smith & Cornell, 1995: 70) and

Norbeck tells us there was a specific room for the purpose, one where there are no shrines to the household gods (Norbeck, 1952: 272). A 48-year-old respondent told me she *was born in the back room and not in the vicinity of the entrance, but it was still tatami* (PE19).

Respondent 21, an 85-year-old from Akita seems to have experienced both worlds as she says: *I returned home before my eldest, she was born on 31st of March. Because she was my eldest, on the 27th I took my things and I returned to the village of my parents. In the village the midwife helped me, she checked on me once at the beginning. Then she came again on the 31st, she was borne around 5. I gave birth at home. My father, you know, he was very old fashioned, and I was supposed to give birth on the straw. But the straw is dangerous, you see, it stuck into your back and was dangerous for the child. It could poke its eyes out. When the midwife came, my old fashioned parents wanted me to give birth on the straw. The midwife was an understanding person and she brought with her covers which she laid over the straw, and I gave birth there, at home. It is quite something, it is difficult to give birth* (PE21). She then goes on: *The idea of pollution was very common. When I was born there was still the tradition that the mother had to stay seated for 21 days after giving birth* (she says with a loud angry voice) (PE21).

It is clear that birthing was kept separate from the household, either in a specific building for that purpose or in a dark room in the house. Following the birth, the woman could have a pollutive effect upon her environs, to the extent of fishermen often being forced to stay on land as the pollution is perceived to be calamitous to the ship. These areas were invariably for women only, where men were prohibited from entering.

## **6.2 Placenta and umbilical cord**

The disposal of the placenta and the umbilicus is important in most societies, and Japan is no exception. Historically, variations exist, but a theme can clearly be discerned: near the house for a girl and immediately beyond the threshold for the boy (Beardsley, 1959: 291); Buried, close to the house for a girl and immediately beyond the threshold for a boy

(Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 106); just before the dirt floored entrance for a boy and just outside the entrance for a girl, so that the son will remain at home and the daughter marry and leave (Norbeck, 1952: 272).

The afterbirth should be put in a pot and buried in the cemetery, and the father is then supposed to walk over it. If not, then the child will fear the animal that next walks over it. It used to be buried under the house, to attach the child to the home (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 105), used to be buried under a plum tree or place where many people stepped (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 38). The idea of placing the placenta where many people walk over it echoes the idea that as each person walks across it they pull just a little bit of pollution with them, leaving the area soon free.

Especially young people were very surprised to hear that this was well known and accepted, as many had never heard of this. Interestingly, the only one to have an opinion though was a 26-year-old respondent: *Placenta .. It is from a long time ago but I heard it was good that it was put in a place where a lot of people stepped on it, where people pass through frequently. Nowadays the hospital disposes of it. My mother has my umbilical cord* (PE05).

During an interview as a 62-year-old (PE22) was discussing having heard about the placenta having been buried in olden times, her daughter interjected that some people also ate it, taking the older women completely by surprise. Rather than reacting negatively though she expressed that it must be very high in nutrients (PE22).

### **6.2.1. Umbilical stub in the modern era**

PE10, a 36-year-old respondent, told me in conspiratorial tone of her shock upon being called to visit her mother-in-law to be shortly before the wedding, whereupon she was told that as she was about to marry her son it was only right that she look after his umbilical stub. Although the experience took her by surprise, the custom of keeping and treasuring the stub is extremely common in Japan. Yanagisawa recounts that this idea of passing on the stub was more frequent, as also noted by Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata (2000: 38). Historically, when

the child grew up, the umbilical stub was handed over to the adult child or their spouse upon marriage for safe keeping (Yanagisawa, 2009: 90). Losing one's cord was considered unlucky.

As much as the disposal of the placenta has been forgotten, the umbilical stub remains very important, with symbolic meaning, kept with important papers in the mother's chest of drawers until death and put in coffin, something to be saved in case of fire (Bernstein and Kidd, 1982: 116). Bernstein recounts the experience of a woman in 1965 who at the time of her marriage felt cut away from her mother seeing as she had been adopted as a child and did not possess her umbilical cord (Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 116). A 58-year-old respondent in Akita told me *It is important to place the umbilical stub in the Kiri no hako and look after it as it is important* (PE01). Then she expressed resentment at her mother not having kept hers, saying it depended on the value the person put on it. That it was important to her but not her mother. When I asked her if this was something she intended to give to her children she pondered and then came to the conclusion that it probably wasn't important to her kids. Also didn't recognise it as having any kind of talismanic properties, merely emotional (PE01).

According to Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata (2000: 38), it would be preserved, wrapped in paper and tucked away, and may be kept until the death of the person, when it is put in the coffin. Interestingly, Norbeck found that it was usually lost before this time and no further thought put to it (Norbeck, 1952: 272), whereas current results seem to indicate a resurgence in its significance.

The box in which the umbilical stub is kept is very often received at the hospital. In later years, I was told, they had changed over to plastic boxes, causing parents to turn and buy a proper wooden box made of paulownia wood (PE14). The box received from the hospital or bought along with an amulet, very often contains images of the crane and the turtle, both longevity symbols.

Some respondents expressed regret *when I picked up the baby, the umbilicus came off on its own, naturally, so I accidentally threw it away. I feel really bad about it but I also found it disagreeable, I didn't want to set it aside but discarded it* (PE04). (PE13) expressed regret,

disappointment, as her son was prematurely born and so she couldn't get the umbilical stub for him; she however keeps a lock of hair and the maternity book with the boxes.

Very often the box used to contain the umbilical stub is also used for storing other mementos, such as the stamp of the child's feet and hands (PE19, 20). *My mother kept the maternity sash with the umbilical cord, as well as the maternal handbook. Usually in Japan you get a handbook once you're pregnant, mother and child, so that is all together. Some people put the child's hair in there, but not heard of the nails. Was very surprised over the keeping of teeth and nails, yet mentioned that as a child she'd thrown her own teeth over the roof* (PE03). A custom also recognized by (PE30), who said this was explained to her by her mother as a way to make the teeth grow straight.

The stub also has some magical qualities, For instance, when a child gets deathly ill, a tea brewed from the stub is supposed to be the ultimate cure; hanging it in the toilet will also cause the child not to cry too much (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 38). Lastly, if the son is wandering, not working and good for nothing, then the mother feeding him the tea of his *heso* will cause him to become more diligent and to stay at home. Simply keeping the *heso* keeps the children close to home.

Only one person admitted to possessing it, yet not knowing its precise whereabouts. *I have it but I don't know where it is* (PE10).

*Because we moved a lot the umbilicus is kept at my husband's home* (PE17; her husband is the oldest son, as was mentioned earlier).

PE09, an elderly woman, wondered laughingly what she should do with it, whether she should return it to her son. Within the box she also kept a lock of hair. One 42-year-old respondent explained the reason for keeping the stub thus *It's such a strong evidence of the bond between mother and child from the past* (PE14).

Below are photographs of the umbilical box kept by PE01, a 68-year-old from Akita. When I started asking her about the stubs she answered nonchalantly, yet as we discussed it

more she became enthused and finally asked if I'd like to see them. She went straight for the cupboard where it was kept and pulled out a silk wrapped box. Therein were the *omamori* talismans she'd received, the childrens *mei mei* (which will be discussed in Section 7.2) as well as all three stubs.



Figure 31: PE01 proudly displays the umbilical stubs of her three grown children

As for the importance of keeping the stubs, a 33-year-old respondent who had expressed very little knowledge of folk beliefs in general nor any interest outside of scientific material, placed considerable emphasis on the spiritual meaning of keeping the umbilical cord as it *It is important to every one, it is after all the bond between mother and child* (PE02).

### 6.3 *Satogaeri*

The tradition of returning to one's home *satogaeri* in order to give birth or immediately following the birth is an age-old custom in Japan and still practised to a large extent. The maternal handbook makes allowances for these travels, inasmuch as all the necessary data is contained there and can be taken to a new hospital or doctor. In recent years, however, there have been issues obtaining a place in a maternity ward, so women have been turned away, in particular *satogaeri* deliveries as the wards are often fully booked with women from their coverage area (Yanagisawa, 2009: 93). The period of *satogaeri* involved varies from 1 to 3 months, during which the mother returns to her parent's home where she can concentrate on looking after and getting to know the infant without the demands of keeping a household. This may seem strange in modern society with its nuclear families, but long working hours contribute to this still being a strong practice. Historically it used to be that the household as a whole shared the looking after of children and childbearing, but now it is mostly up to the woman herself, leaving first-time mothers often exhausted and nervous. In earlier society, the woman did not necessarily look after the child herself, very often it was the task of the paternal grandmother to bathe, feed and discipline the child (Bernstein and Kidd, 1982: 102).

The current social importance of *satogaeri* was clearly exemplified in the 2011 *Satogaeri* project, which provided assistance for pregnant women evacuated from the disaster zone in 2011. These women were often isolated and bereft of their families as well as their social support system, and although the assistance came in various forms, the most relevant to the current discussion was the possibility of a month home stay with a family following the birth of a child (Kobayashi, 2008; Nagayama, 2000).

In later years there has been considerable research done on the psychological benefits of *satogaeri*, in particular in relation to depression (Yoshida *et al.*, 2001; Kobayashi, 2010). However the negative effects are perceived to be:

- First, the woman cannot be monitored by the same midwife or obstetrician throughout her pregnancy and the postnatal period.



- Second, her husband has to work and live separately from his wife until his wife returns to their marital house with the newborn baby. There may be marital discord or disharmony because of this period of separation and the psychological interaction between father and baby may be affected.
- Finally, a new mother tends to depend on her own family members and that makes the new mother feel anxious about child care when and after the new mother has to leave her original family (Yoshida *et al.*, 2001: 193).

Yet in spite of this the tradition is as popular today as it was more than 300 years ago, with more than 100,000 women (~15% of peri-natal women) choosing to honour it each year (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2011; Kobayashi, 2008; Nagayama, 2000).

Generally the pregnant woman returns to her parents house one or two months before birth.

Did you return? *Yes, then you remain in the home for a while after birth. I returned one month before birth, gave birth there and then stayed for about a month after (PE10).*

*I didn't return, but that was because grandfather was ill (PE04).*

PE19 and 20 Returned for a month for their first child, but gave birth in a hospital the second time *I was already living with my parents but I rested my body for 21 days after giving birth (PE22).*

*Satogaeri* didn't always go so well. Respondent (PE22) had a fitful experience as whilst she was about to give birth, her cousin was also pregnant and it was complicated with her in-laws as well. In the end her mother came to her home and stayed with her for 2 weeks, but her mother she felt, was taken advantage of (PE22). A young woman in Akita (33 years) returned home for all three births and stayed for approximately one month each time (PE26).

A 26-year-old woman asserted that *A number of women return to their homes for satogaeri, even if they live with their parents-in-law because of the anxiety of having the first child (PE05).*

Returning home, especially for the birth of one's first child, seems very common and interesting to note that when respondents did not they feel compelled to explain why. Those who didn't return home generally had their mother come and stay with them instead, or they

stayed with their parents-in-law, thus maintaining intact the intergenerational interaction.

## **6.4 The modern birthing experience**

Davies-Floyd has emphasised the experience a labouring woman has of losing control in the face of the technocratic environment in which she finds herself. Hence the decision of remaining stoic, persevering, could be perceived as a rebellion against the supremacy of technology. However, as Houston has argued, it comes closer to being “a symbolic act of discipline for the new social role that lies ahead” (Houston, 1999; Davis-Floyd, 1992). “Obstetrician’s access to and control over certain technological tools and techniques reflect and legitimize his ultimate authoritative status over the midwife who delivers the baby and the woman who is giving birth” (Fiedler, 1996: 196).

(PE01) after exclaiming that driving is bad for the baby, also added *When I had gone 18 days over we went for a drive and immediately afterwards she was born*. When probed she added that she’d heard this from other people as well as just known this. *If a woman is very large and looks about ready to give birth then she shouldn’t go for a drive*.

Historically, in many districts, should a woman be having a difficult delivery, her husband or a relative usually will lead a horse in the direction of the mountain in order to receive the mountain deity. Sometimes a scroll depicting the mountain deity, or some magical symbol, such as a rice spoon or pillow, is hung at a pregnant woman's bedside. The rice spoon is a symbol of the phallus and is held in the right hand of the mountain deity.

Among the respondents, considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of remaining stoic throughout the process, not screaming out loud.

### **6.4.1 Supportive person or husband**

Having a supportive person in the delivery room is a relatively new option, as expressed by 68-year-old PE01: *When I gave birth, men weren’t in the room, they were definitely not in*

*the room. Always just women except for the doctor.* Even today it is at the discretion of the hospital staff and not all women wish for their spouses to participate. As 33-year-old PE02 expressed *I wouldn't want my husband with me whilst giving birth as it would feel very awkward. I would feel embarrassed* (PE02).

A common story expressed was that of the husband's work commitments and the priority thereof: *My husband did not attend. He rushed back from work. It was simply normal for the man not to attend at that time because it was not a thing for the husband to get time off from work* (PE25).

Fiedler also came across the situation in the hospital where she was doing fieldwork that the hospital did not allow any other supporting persons other than the husband (Fielder, 1996: 210), immediately further establishing the set expectation of children only being born in wedlock.

*My husband did not attend. It's not that I didn't want him to attend, but because I returned to my home town, my husband would have had to travel a great distance* (PE10). The one interview where the husband participated it transpired that he had waited outside during the birth, at the telling of which he expressed deep pride at his level of participation (PE12).

Bernstein and Kidd experienced both females who did not wish for their partners to attend as they would look ugly during the process, as well as doctors expressing the belief that having a partner in the room would spoil the woman leading to her screaming more (Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 112).

#### **6.4.2 Stoicism and pain relief**

The stoicism that the doctor expressed above has long been a part of birthing in Japanese culture. A woman in order to properly demonstrate her worth as a mother must stand strong, also women who scream or cry out get made fun of although this is somewhat on the decline (Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 113).

If a mother does not suffer through the "natural" bodily experience of pain when she gives birth,

it is believed that she is too self-oriented to gain the empathy required of a "true" mother. The display of stoicism during labour and childbirth thus becomes the ultimate test of maternal discipline. Giving birth with pain is not only viewed as more "natural," but also viewed as an important step in consciously experiencing the act of becoming a mother (Houston, 1999).

Thus the 'Natural' experience is preferred and should anaesthesia be made use of, then the birthing is perceived as having been 'artificial'. The idea of bearing the pain in silence goes back a ways as exemplified in Ella Wiswell's 1935 recount of a village woman explaining that people would laugh at a screaming woman, "Why people would laugh at you if you cry or even moan" "It is a sign of their strong will" (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 101). After having given birth by herself the woman said "it can be done if you make up your mind to do it. Of course it is not very nice, then she laughed as she recounted that her husband didn't wake up until the child began crying (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 107).

The idea that in order to gain closeness to the child the mother needs to fully experience the pain involved.

Use of drugs in giving birth is generally discouraged as it is believed to be dangerous for the infant. Anaesthesia can be arranged but most will have to be discussed and arranged beforehand and is not available at all maternity wards (Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 112). The Japanese government booklet recommends, alongside exercise and breathing, that the woman employ positive thinking for pain relief (Bernstein & Kidd, 1982: 112). Yanagisawa found that rural women were more likely to complain about work conditions and in-laws than birthing.

As Yanagisawa states, "persevering through labour pain is a kind of ritual through which a woman becomes a mother" and she goes on to quote that the pain promotes the development of the mother's love for her child (Yanagisawa, 2009: 91).

#### **6.4.3 Pain and intervention**

The data becomes somewhat contradictory inasmuch as Yanagisawa argues for the prevalence of episiotomy as being a provider-induced belief and thus performed perfunctorily

on all primi-paras. This is done regardless of whether there are any medical issues or not (Yanagisawa, 2009: 91), while according to Bernstein it is only practised when necessary (Bernstein, 1982: 113). “In Japan, a prevailing cultural view of birth as a natural and healthy event places a value on using the least possible amount of obstetrical intervention in the birthing process” (Fiedler, 1996: 195).

Pain relief is definitely discouraged within the Japanese birthing environment (Bernstein and Kidd, 1982: 112) and anaesthesia is recognized as being inherently dangerous to the baby. Fiedler observed in her research 1987–1991 that Japanese women assumed a passive role once in the hospital, in bed and wearing hospital gown, whereas in the midwife clinic the women wore their own clothes throughout (Fiedler, 1996: 202).

Perseverance or *gaman* — Houston repeatedly observed midwives encouraging women in labour to ‘please persevere’ *gaman kudasai* when a sound escaped (Houston, 1999).

## **6.7 Time of birth and birthdate**

When pursuing information about auspicious or inauspicious day to be born on I received very few answers aside from the aforementioned *hinoeuma*. The only such association was for a child to be born on either the doll festival or on children’s day. *Haven’t heard of days influencing the character of a child, but I have heard that people find it good for a girl to be born on doll festival and boys on children’s day* (PE05). As well as minor association with the Chinese 12 year animal cycle: *My mother was born in the year of the rooster, I think she tends to be loud like a rooster and she tends to talk a lot, other than that I don’t think there is much connection* (PE10).

What however came through strongly once I queried birthdates was the deliberate changing thereof. The first of either the year or of the new fiscal/school year seemed very auspicious, and even though it probably stems from the expectation that the child can enter school a year early and thus acquire a head start the explanations were mostly using terms

such as luck. *A child born in March, end of March, was very unlucky because of the Japanese calendar year, but first of January was a very lucky day, so that people born even in November or in late January were said to have been born on the 1st so in the old days there were a lot of people born on the first* (laughs) (PE01). A 31-year-old from Yamanashi, close to Tokyo, claimed there had been a child in her class whose birth date had been altered, so that even though the official documents said 31<sup>st</sup> of March he had been born on April 2<sup>nd</sup> (PE18). *My mother-in-law's birthday is January the 1st on the registry but it seems to be made up, and that date is considered to be lucky, to be good* (PE20). *I have just such a friend. Well we're more acquaintances, so her birthday was changed by a few days in January. So her birthday was originally 20th of December and it got changed to the 1st or 2nd of January. And she's from here* (PE22).

*My mother's date was changed, she was born very big and her parents thought it would be much better if she went to school a year early so they moved her birthday from April to March. This is so she could go to school earlier* (PE03).

This fluidity in assigning birthdays seems still to exist to a minor level and not only apply to people unlucky enough to be born of the last days of the school or calendar year. *My real birthday was the 9th of August, but the notification of my birth was only submitted on the 19th, after ten days. Because August 9th is Obon (festival of the dead in Bhuddist tradition) they seem to have moved it so as to not land on the Bon festival. My mother hated having given birth during Obon and because she gave birth with a midwife not in a hospital they reported a different birthday* (PE19).

Weekdays, months or even auspicious or inauspicious days do not seem to be of direct import, festival days and not being last on the school or the fiscal, year still possess meaning.

## **6.8 Chapter review**

Susan Burns has argued that through Confucian ideology the woman is made to bear responsibility for the child's well-being and that to "safely deliver a child was considered an

ethical achievement that was of profound social significance" (Burns, 2002: 179). Health, intelligence, character are according to this theory determined by the mother's behaviour throughout the pregnancy (Burns, 2002: 186). Houston reports mothers expressing doubts as to their competency as mothers as they had not experienced the true pain of childbirth (Houston, 1999).

Citing Richard Bauman, where he declares that "folklore is about the politics of culture", Robbie Davies-Floyd in discussing symbolic messages hidden behind the "scientific guise of hospital routines" argues that whilst depriving "women of their innate uniqueness and power as birth givers" while at the same time perpetuating the "cultural belief in women's innate physiological inferiority" (Davies-Floyd, 1992: 71). However Davies-Floyd's technocratic model was based on her research in the USA. Emphasising the woman's lack of control in the birthing process does not fit properly with the Japanese model, as Japanese women are expected to make their own way, walk, rather than be immediately in a wheelchair. Women are entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining their own records, the *Boshi Tenchō*, wherein lies a certain amount of empowerment as well as responsibility.

## Chapter 7: Post-natal period

Although the child has been safely delivered and the mother is well, the ritual process is far from over. This marks the beginning of a period marked with a number of rituals, which all in one way or another involve the re-integration of the mother as well as the integration of the child into society. The association for Shinto Shrines lists the following three post-partum rituals as being of great importance:

- the naming of the child on the seventh day;
- the first shrine visit, occurring on the 31<sup>st</sup> day for a boy and the girls before the 33<sup>rd</sup> day, although they themselves point out that variations exist; and
- the *Kuizome*, the weaning ceremony, which is also traditionally called *momoya*, the kanji literally translating as the 100 days.<sup>63</sup>

Considerable variations exist within these, which we shall explore through the varying experiences of the respondents. Ritually, the mother has been cleansed of her pollution after 30 or 100 days, as shall be better discussed in the next section, yet the child is still a part of her until it turns seven, although continually becoming more and more independent. Consequently we shall look at the various festivals that mark the ongoing life transitions of the child from birth and until 7 years. Historically, the child would have been presented to the birthing goddess, *ubu-no-kami* soon after birth, and birth rice offered to the goddess, often with a small dent in the middle if the child was a girl so as to induce dimples to appear on the child (Sofue, 1965: 150; Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 14). The mother was also to eat sweets and soup (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 103). Dietary taboos and constraints were that she should not eat river fish or fish with scales, octopus, shrimp or flatfish. If she eats fish, then the mother becomes unstable, the blood becomes unstable and the babies might get diarrhoea.

She also must not eat deep-fried tofu, fatty meat and especially blue finned fish, marinated, soba (buckwheat noodles), *kiki*, *nashi*, *matsutake* or *shitiake mushrooms*, nor foods that cool

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<sup>63</sup> The 1946 organized Shinto Association <http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/iroha/sonota/index2.html>



her, as her body would not heal. However *abura-age* (fried tofu), chillies, spicy, hot, smelly, foods as well as *kombu* (seaweed) are all good (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 27).

## **7.1 Pollution and taboo**

The polluting element of birth was considerable, as has been broached above. The mother's body was historically seen as being polluted for the first approximately 30 days, although considerable regional variations exist, ranging from 21 to 100 (Sofue, 1965: 152; Norbeck, 1952: 272; Emiko, 1987: s68). *The mother was supposed to stay indoors for the first 21 days, and if you gave birth at home you were not supposed to return until after the 21<sup>st</sup> day. I went to the shrine within those days though* (PE25). Takao Sofue mentions that the soul of the child was thought to not have been properly planted in the body until at this time.

The polluting element was historically felt considerably more strongly, with the mother not being allowed to come close to cooking for fifteen days following birth, she had to cover her head were she to venture outside, and in some households the mothers ate apart from the rest of the family (Norbeck, 1952: 273). She was also not supposed to attend the public baths during this time (Bernstein, 1982: 113). Modern sources cite the possibility of infection through the custom of sharing the bathwater as the reason to avoid bathing; consequently they suggest avoiding bathing whilst there is still discharge, for approximately a month. Interestingly aligning with the older tradition of pollution.

A tradition of sewing talismanic signs into the kimono of the child was not known by many (Mori, 2007), but the idea of making the child's first garment was. *At the time of my grandmother, when you sewed the kimono for a baby you would use old clothes. You would choose clothes of healthy people, so it was a charm, the child would grow healthy. This is from the time of my mother, 70 years* (PE03).

### **7.1.3 Twins**

Ideas pertaining to having twins were surprisingly well known and strong. Historically

they were viewed as a negative, with one being either ceremoniously or literally given away, thus restoring balance anew. A 68-year-old respondent described twins thus *In the old days twins were an extremely bad thing. Therefore one of the twins was taken out, taken into the mountains or onto crossroads, there other people would pick them up and bring back. In even earlier times the children would be given away. But today twins are a very good thing* (PE01). Not only did they break the mould and thus exemplify that which was liminal, but there was an added belief as to their previous life: *Twins with both genders were particularly unwelcome. In Japan it's not easy to get married and even in the old days many people couldn't marry those they wished. So there were a number of double suicides, people who wanted to be with each other but could only do so in death. It is said twins, boy and a girl, were those suicide couples being reborn, so it was a very negative thing. This was even during early Showa, so often the midwife would secretly kill one* (PE05). This was seconded by (PE13).

Other variants expressed were ancient enemies: *In the old days, twins were thought to be the reincarnation of ancient enemies, result of an old strife, one person killing another. Perhaps the samurai of old* (PE24) or that they were a divided person: *If you were born a twin you were born two people of one, a divided person. One will break, there was also the possibility that one would die or become weak* (PE03).

The young couple respondents (PE12) however exemplified modern attitudes when they said they would love to have twins. And a 33-year-old from Nagoya expressed a longing for twins and their inherent cuteness (PE02).

Although having twins was perceived as unlucky, (PE01) pointed out that luck will come to those who crack an egg with twins.

## **7.2 Seventh-day Ceremony – Naming**

Naming usually takes place before the child reaches seven days, and within 14 days the notification of birth must be submitted to the municipal office of either your legal domicile or

the birthplace. This must be accompanied by the birth certificate, Maternity handbook *boshi kenkō techō*, as well as the personal seal of either the mother or the father. This formality is often associated with a naming ceremony, which often doubled as the first visit. The naming ceremony, usually referred to as *Shichiya*, the seventh-day celebration, has also been referred to as *kamitate* (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 102) and *Nazuke* (Sofue, 1965: 150). Until 7 days old, babies were not thought of as belonging to this world; at that point they were allowed to wear clothes with sleeves (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 44). It is also common for the hair to have been shaved at that time, so as to stimulate further growth, as in the case of the 36-year-old from Gunma and her son: *He had such long hair from when he was born that I cut it a week after returning from the hospital. I still keep it together with the umbilical stub and the talisman I got from Suitengu* (PE10). A popular memento of late is to use the first hair to make a special decorative calligraphy brush. *My hair was shaved, also my niece and nephew. By taking all the hair at once it is believed it will grow back stronger. I don't know whether it's scientifically proven really. And then there is a brush made, a calligraphy brush for writing the name* (PE03).

Wiswell recounts how the naming ceremony in 1930s Suyu Mura was traditionally held on the third day after birth, but that in the case she experienced, it was held back until the seventh day due to the father's absence for work reasons (Smith & Wiswell, 1982: 102). Variations in times and placements were expressed: *Because we didn't have an altar at home we placed it on the piano* (the *meimei*) (PE14); *Naming ceremony dinner with the family, the meimei placed on the altar* (PE19, 20 and more). The naming ceremony celebrated after 2 weeks: *We put the name card on the Shinto altar. You invite the parents and the husbands' siblings and celebrate at the low table. You cook red rice and show off your baby* (PE23); *red rice at the naming ceremony* (PE25); naming day *When my sister was born we celebrated the naming day and because this was in the countryside the house was filled with relatives and then we placed the name on the altar* (PE02).



Figure 32: The naming ceremony of PE24



Figure 33: The mei mei, name card for the son of PE24

### 7.2.1 The Choosing of a name

There are numerous factors at play when it comes to choosing a name for the child, and like most cultures various characteristics and cultural elements are associated with the choice of name, and most respondents felt it was both a responsibility as well as an honour to name a child. There are also rituals associated with the actual naming, both cultural and traditional elements to the choice of names as well as who does the choosing and in what manner. The amount of feedback received in the interviews on the background and the story of the naming choices is the reason for the disproportionate size of this section.

The average Japanese name normally consists of two kanji symbols for the given name and two for the surname. Each Kanji can have multiple readings, i.e. sounds with which they are associated, as well as definite meanings. Naming traditions have changed considerably over the years, so some thought needs to be given to the intrinsic meaning and value of naming in order to comprehend the traditions and rituals associated. There is some data indicating that upon *Genpuku*, i.e. coming of age ceremony, boys were historically wont to change their names from their *Yōmyō* [幼名] to their adult names. The custom however was not universal and tended to be limited to the warrior families. In her research on name changes, Louise Nagata found that some men had changed their names up to 5 times and this often hinged upon a change in status, change in sibling order or associations (Louise Nagatata,

1999). It was not until 1898 upon the enactment of the family registry law that it became mandatory for all to possess both a given name and a surname. While surnames are set, parents have choice in the composition of their child's given name. Currently there are 2997 *kanji* from whence parents are allowed to choose the composition of their child's name, as the Ministry of Justice publishes an easily available list of the *kanji*, Chinese characters, which are permissible, i.e. from which parents can choose in order to compose the child's name.<sup>64</sup> Names fluctuate, and go in and out of fashion. For instance, the very popular girls' name ending -ko [子] which enjoyed considerable popularity from the early 20th century through to the mid-1980s is now almost unheard of among newborns. Similarly between 1987 and 1997, Ai [愛] and Misaki [美咲] were the most popular names for girls. Ai means love, and it may express the parents' hope that their child will grow up to be a person loved by everyone. Misaki means beauty and bloom, and of course parents want their child to be in beautiful bloom. “翔太Shota” (Satō, 2007). The thought behind the limited list is that of protecting the child from being given an inappropriate name, something which has become an issue of late. The most famous such case being in 1993, when parents in Akishima city, sought to name their child *Akuma*, [悪魔] or devil/demon, a plea which was first accepted based on the fact that the two *kanji* contained therein were permitted according to the list, but later declined, beginning a long discussion about names and inherent meanings within Japanese media (Otake, 2012).

The current naming trend which has caused considerable alarm in Japan is when parents choose characters based on their intrinsic meaning, as symbols and then associate them with sounds that are generally not associated with that *kanji*. As a 22-year-old respondent put it:

*The new names defy tradition in such a way that most Japanese would not think them suitable for humans. Some parents think an unusual and an individual name is good, and so the number of names that cannot be read is increasing. As this can bring a lot of trouble for the child in later years, many feel that these parents are essentially treating their children like*

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<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Justice, list of permitted *Kanji* <http://www.moj.go.jp/MINJI/minji86.html>

*pets and not considering the future life of their child (PE31).*

One of the reasons for the harsh feedback has been that these children, once adult will experience a harder time getting employment, as future employers are likely to view these names as belonging to non-traditional families (Sato, 2007).<sup>65</sup>

Some examples of how these negatively perceived names present themselves:

- The reading is wrong. For example “心” being read as “Kokoa” when it is normally and correctly read as “kokoro” . A name often reserved for pets referring to their chocolate coat.
- Then there are names which are normally not perceived as names appropriate for people, for instance place names “Hokkaido” [北海道]. Another such example would be of inappropriate names such as Mizuko [水子] meaning aborted foetus.
- Thirdly, it seems increasingly popular to choose names that confuse a reading and a meaning. For instance “天使”, which is correctly read Tenshi and means angel, but the parents insist that it be read “Angel”, a foreign word (Sugawara, 2012: 27).

In spite of the recent outrage, Japanese culture is no stranger to strange or unusual names, as names were often based on the order in which the children arrived, or semi-magical, inasmuch as when parents did not wish for more children they would name their child “末” “捨” “留” which means an end or stop. It was quite common as well for children to be named based on the season in which they were born. Similarly if a couple wished for a boy, a common practice would be to give the last born daughter a boys name, and the reverse should they wish for a girl. *In the old days names were influenced by the day, for instance a child born on new years, Masako, because the kanji is that of new years. Or Tomeko, if that child*

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<sup>65</sup> Similarly children, often of mixed heritage, who bear a name not written with kanji but with katakana, the phonetic script reserved for foreign words, experience prejudice when applying for work based on their non Japaneseness.

Kittaka, Louise George (2013) Prove you're Japanese: when being bicultural can be a burden Parents' decision to add a katakana name can create issues when kids enter the big wide world. Japan Times: Issues. <[http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/07/29/issues/prove-youre-japanese-when-being-bicultural-can-be-a-burden/#.U4DA\\_XZAf9o](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/07/29/issues/prove-youre-japanese-when-being-bicultural-can-be-a-burden/#.U4DA_XZAf9o)>

*had a hard birth and stopped tomero. In the old days people had many children so sometimes they'd name them by numbers ichiro, jiro, ...nowadays people have very few children so the names have changed* (PE01, a 58-year-old mother of three from Akita). Another respondent added *Saburo* to *ichiro, jiro* indicating that they were called first, second and third (PE07, a 68-year-old mother of two, Tokyo).

Interestingly enough, compared with other cultures, naming for, or naming children exactly the same name as, a relative does not seem to have been nor is common. In fact Harada recounts that it was thought to weaken the spirit of both people and served as an invite for calamity and misfortune (Harada, 1928).

A 22-year-old student from Tokyo described the quite complicated thought process that went into the choosing of her and her brother's name in considerable detail, which shows clearly the amount of thought put into choosing the right *kanji* and the perceived power therein.

*In my case, my mother gave me and my brother opposite names because she wanted him to go far away and me to stay near her. My brother's name has two meanings. His name is “航 Wataru”, and the first meaning of it is “go over” and “make a voyage.” He is a boy, so my mother wanted to him to go far away and experience many things, and grow up to be a great person. The second meaning is “to pass to the end of one's life safely.” His Chinese character, 航, is usually read “Kou”, but my mother did not like how it sounded, so she chose “Wataru.”*

*My mother had two possible names for me when I was born. These are “渚 Nagisa” and “海 Kai.” “渚” means “beach” and “the water's edge” and “海” means “ocean.” She thought that if she named me “海 Kai” I might go far away when I grew up. She wanted to me to stay near to her, so in the end she did not choose “海 Kai.” She chose the name “渚 Nagisa” both for its meaning and for a sportscaster who had the same name. My mother thought the sportscaster, was “渚左 Nagisa”, had a strong mind because had*

*had a hard life. She had suddenly lost her husband, but she came back. So my mother wanted me to grow up to be a strong person who has a strong mind and spirit. And my mother wanted me to experience hardships because they would encourage me to cultivate a strong spiritual strength, such as the sports caster, "渚左 Nagisa."*

She then added

*Funnily enough, I and my brother's names are opposite to our character because my brother loves our family and home, so he desires to stay nearby. I, on the other hand, have been to foreign countries many times, and now, I am studying abroad. Of course children don't necessarily grow up in the way their name suggested, but most Japanese people believe that meaningful names are important for the self-formation of children (PE31, a 22-year-old from Tokyo)*

These thoughts echo ideas pertaining to the magical powers of the umbilical stub in Section 6.2.1.

*Quite often a child will get one kanji from a loved or respected relative (PE01).*

*In our case father decided on the names, he researched them in a naming book. The oldest child was named after a famous actor (laughter) and then father chose a good kanji for that name. The second child was named after an historical village which he loved. The third he chose a random name without consulting me at all, so mother doesn't know the meaning at all. So is that common for the father to choose the names? It was, but these days I think people consult each other. In the old days it would have been the father or rather the grandfather (PE01).*

*If there was a very nice person who recently died, I think children were named after them. Because they were good people the children will also be good (PE01).*

*In Japan it is very important to give thought to the number of strokes. So did you give thought to this upon choosing your children's names? Father did. But now there are people that don't give thought to this I think (PE01). When telling me that her husband chose the name: well you see, there is this whole thing about the number of strokes or even going to*



*shrine for divination. Making it sound complicated and thus in his realm (PE17). The name was decided before birth, my husband decided and two friends went over to make sure the number of strokes were good. During the naming ceremony I wrote the name with a brush and put it on a shelf. My husband put a lot of thought into this, because he wanted to bring in grandfather's kanji (PE10). Technology was also brought into play. I bought the software (for number of stroke inquiries), my husband was having a difficult time choosing and I became the master of names (laughter). I did it on a pc (PE14).*

*Importance of not making the child's life difficult: Oh I only gave them a name I wished, after I'd asked if she had given thought to the stroke number (PE04). It is important to not give the children too complicated a name, a kanji with not too many strokes. It is awful when the child has a hard time learning their name and everyone tests them (laughter). Her friend agreed, oh yeah, difficult kanji poor children. Simple is the best, some names are also just strange (PE04). I wanted the name Ruriki for my daughter but the kanji was so difficult we changed it to Yuriko.*

*Assigning characteristics to the child through their name: If you add the -ko, child, ending to your child's name then there will be a lot of children. When you name a boy you want a strong name, or prosperous meaning. If you have 'knowledge' kanji then the child will grow up to be wise (PE03).*

*Naming can depend on the area (PE08); the kanji for beautiful for a girl and health for a boy (PE07); I was named after my grandfather (PE09); counting names such as ichiro, jiro, saburo (PE07); aware of people around her checking the stroke order (PE05); choose a name of a worthy person as you're wishing those qualities upon the child (PE05); I don't know where I heard it but I've heard that it's not good if the child carries the name of the parent (PE05).*

*Names sometimes given as a matter of duty. In my time (she is 85 at the time) my mother was weak and therefore gave birth in the hospital, therefore her parents-in-law spent a lot of money paying for the hospital. So they chose. This is a very common story (PE21).*

(PE20) asked friends and family for good names and then chose one out of 10. Her name was the name of a famous actress at the time. (PE19) had her husband choose; her name came from her grandmother. Neither gave much thought to stroke number. *My cousin got a name chosen for her by the local shrine* (PE20).

It is obvious that the choice of name is a serious issue and that a lot of thought goes into choosing just the right name. What were also interesting were all the family stories that emerged, leading to a wealth of material.

### **7.3 First shrine visit – Hatsumiyamairi**

*When we went for the hatsumiyamairi I was dressed neatly in a white dress, a lot of people also dress up in their kimono. It is appropriate because it is a ceremony. It is the purification ceremony where the priest prays for the child to live a happy and healthy life, and they also gave me charm. So who went? There were only three of us, me, my baby and my husband. ... We went on an auspicious day to the shrine in our neighbourhood. And we had to pay a fee, the fees differ between shrines, but ours was 5000 yen* (PE10).

The first shrine visit, the *Hatsumiyamairi* (初宮参り) takes place around 30 days after the birth of a child. This is when the mother emerges from her pollutive state, when the baby is presented before the tutelary deity, and very often the point at which the mother returns home from *satogaeri*. In earlier times mothers were not allowed at the *hatsumiyamairi* (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 42).

Yet there is considerable variation, often with an earlier date for boys than girls, as well as in recent times overlap with other rituals, such as the case *O miyamairi*: *It depends on the area when the baby is taken to the shrine. So the mother, the father, and grandmother and maybe grandfather go to the shrine. You go to ask the god for a happy, energetic and healthy baby. Did you also do this? I went, however, I didn't really give much heed to the precise number of days. But normally it is ...? Normally, ... here ... maybe 120 days?* (PE01).

Sofue noted the differences in dates, finding that they varied from 20 to 30 days and that

out of 269 places, 135 celebrated boys earlier, 43 celebrated girls earlier and 91 were the same (Sofue, 1965: 152). According to Kuraishi *et al.*, the earliest the first shrine visit is celebrated is the 7th day, and the latest is the 100th day *momoka mairi* 百日参り (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 47).

The ceremony made the international news when prince Hisahito was first presented at the family shrine.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 34: A paternal grandmother proudly holds her grandson during his first shrine visit



Figure 35: The baby kimono referenced by PE24 as having only ever been worn once

Very often the child will be dressed in a ceremonial kimono and be carried either by the mother or the paternal grandmother. In the images above you can see a paternal grandmother at a shrine in Nagoya and then the baby kimono featured in the next excerpt. *My husband's relatives sent a gorgeous kimono for our son. It's wonderful yet such a waste because he can only use it once. And he threw up on it* (PE24).

Having already expressed that people in Akita don't really go to shrines she mentioned having gone to the shrine with the first two children. In their 3rd month: *I went mostly for fun with my friend, they had children 3 days after me and we became friends. So father didn't go, just us three with the children. We went to Hachiman shrine and prayed but also for the fun of it* (laughter) (PE22). *First shrine visit at approximately 3 months* (PE05).

<sup>66</sup> BBC News 14 November 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6146030.stm>

*You have to pay, but in my day it was free. According to her it differs considerably between families (PE01). I didn't really do it for me but for the grandmother and grandfather. Many who go only go for their mother-in-law but it differs between region (PE04). We went at 199 days. I went with my husband and parents to the local shrine, our tutelary deity, which was followed by a festive dinner at home (PE14). 2 weeks (PE15). At one month I was taken to a shrine near my grandparents' house (PE18).*

*The first time, with the first child, I wore a kimono; however the second time I wore just nice clothes (PE20). I believe everyone does this, when discussing hatsumiyamairi and that rather than going to a local shrine they went to a shrine famous for this purpose, Atsuta Jingu<sup>67</sup> (PE02).*

### **7.3.1 Signs in the baby**

*If the child has a high forehead it will be clever and if it has big earlobes then it is "fukumimi" and it will become rich (PE10, 12, 18) If the earlobes are large, the child will be happy and make loads of money (laughter) (PE14). These were heard repeatedly, yet very few other such credences were witnessed. This is where the handbook on folklore and the collective results of the Japanese folklorists would have been a remarkable source for comparison; unfortunately very few superstitious beliefs like these were found.*

One of the few to suggest a connection between zodiac signs and character: *"I've heard many a docile child was born (Usagi) in the year of the Rabbit, many a white-coloured child," but I, ah.. G: White skin colour? A: Like that, white skin. Everyone in the same grade or year of the Rabbit year of the tiger's of people my age, I am in the Rabbit, and there are quite a few children of friends who are a Tiger, my friends tell me they make for quite an active child. I have heard many instances of the lead character of the animal is a little something like the nature of the child (PE15).*

## **7.4 Weaning ceremony — Kuizome**

The next large celebratory rite in the life of the child and the mother is the weaning

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<sup>67</sup> 1-1-1, Jingu, Atsuta-ku, Nagoya, Aichi 456-8585

ceremony, whereupon the child is ritually first introduced to solid foods in front of parents and grandparents. This takes place on the child's 100<sup>th</sup> day after birth. Also referred to as the *Momoka*, the 100-day ceremony.

Often a fully ritualized event, the food served is usually red rice<sup>68</sup> grilled sea bream, soup, rice and a stone. The stone is symbolic and is only brought to the lips of the infant, as is actually all the food, so as to induce the child to have healthy strong teeth and appetite (Sofue, 1965: 153). The ceremony is usually celebrated with paternal grandparents, and less often maternal ones.

The husband in a couple interviewed expressed that the ceremony functioned so as to *make sure the child will have a healthy appetite and not be a picky eater, and that it will grow well and healthy*. When asked about possible religious connotations they answered that *it is 'only' tradition* (PE12).

Whether the celebration lands on an auspicious day or not enters into play as well, as parents are recommended to celebrate those days falling on a *taian* (auspicious) day rather than *butsumetsu* (inauspicious)<sup>69</sup>. There is some difference between areas with (PE01) exclaiming that *shichiya and kuizome celebrations vary between areas but aren't celebrated around here (Akita)*. Interestingly enough, just over a year later her daughter had a child and then they celebrated the ritual, echoing what seems to be a common trend, inasmuch as daughters are teaching the rituals to their parents. There seems to be a considerable increase in young people seeking out these rituals. Consequently in recent years there has been a rise in restaurants offering *Kuizome* services<sup>70</sup> wherein they offer package deals for the family to celebrate together, even going so far as to suggest or offer photographic services as well. The

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<sup>68</sup> Red rice is generally served at auspicious times and is cooked with beans so as to give it its distinctive colour

<sup>69</sup> <http://iwaigoto.web.fc2.com/children>

<sup>70</sup> Example of a Restaurant offering these services:

<http://www.gakushikaikan.co.jp/restaurant/nishiki/okuizome.html>

And searching for restaurants offering Kuizome on Teblog will yield 108 results <http://tabelog.com/> and hotels <http://placehub.co/lists/11595>

popular online store Rakuten<sup>71</sup> (Play.com in the UK) sells an array of specific traditional Kuizome dining sets for exorbitant sums. A sharp change from *kuizome* rituals documented from a decade or two ago, where the cutlery and dinnerware were merely the usual family ones, or perhaps a cutesy set which the child would then later use. Thus respondent PE15 is an example of the modern practitioners: *we celebrated at 100 days, with seabream, then we imitated feeding the soup to him along with red ceremonial rice*. Then she tells me that she liked the tradition and that she probably found all the relevant information via a book (PE15). So a considerable business has spun up around the ritual, with photostudios offering specific photo sessions and hotels offering to host.<sup>72</sup>

*We celebrated the weaning ceremony at home. It's on day 100. We had sea bream and both sets of grandparents came* (PE13). (PE20) *because we lived with my husband's parents we had the ceremony there, we got a set from the shrine*.

*Ceremony at home, with my parents, my parents-in-law did not come I think it was around the 100th day and it was only the close family, no stone* (PE23).

At 100 days (PE26) went and had plenty of formal photographs taken.

*Weaning ceremony practiced by her sisters, I do not remember the time, one month? Three months? You dress the child in a white kimono, and sit by a low table and then imitate eating and have the picture taken* (PE03).

(PE07) only practiced kuizome with her first child. (PE08) wondered if it was done on different days for female or male children, thinking 100 for a boy and 101 for a girl.

(PE05) seems to be mixing two traditions together when referring to the weaning ceremony, as she said *I heard that if the child picks up the stone then the child will have strong teeth and will be strong*. Which is reminiscent of the Buddhist tradition of having a child choose from 3 things so as to give an indication as to its future (Sofue, 1965: 156). *It's common in Kyushu, normally a book, abacus and something* (PE16). At around one year the

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<sup>71</sup> [http://global.rakuten.com/en/store/akacyann/item/b20-9b20-7h/?s-id=borderless\\_recommend\\_item\\_en](http://global.rakuten.com/en/store/akacyann/item/b20-9b20-7h/?s-id=borderless_recommend_item_en)

<sup>72</sup> Example Studio Mario <http://www.studio-mario.jp/event/momoka/>

child is offered a ruler, *fude pen*<sup>73</sup>, *soroban*<sup>74</sup> and others (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 53) *Choosing three things, the mother had heard of it but never witnessed, the daughter added that if the child went for the money then he or she would not be troubled for money in their life* (PE22).

## 7.6 First birthday - *Hatsutanjō*

Up until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1873, Japan had a very different way of reckoning age, *Kazoedoshi*, wherein a person would be a year older, so a newborn would immediately be aged 1 and then the age would be counted from New Years day, not from the persons actual birth date (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 41) so a child born in December could be nominally 2 years of age before it had reached one month in actual age. Therefore birthdays have not had a great historical significance within the socio-cultural milieu. This also explains why there often seem to be slight confusions in regards to ages of ceremonies, or for instance starting school, as one speaks about the age of 7 for starting school, while most children are in fact 6.

### 7.6.1. *Chikaramochi/issshō mochi*

A tradition upon the child's first birthday is that of the power ricecake, the strength cake. The mother will tie a heavy rice cake (*mochi*) to the back of the one-year-old and have the child try to walk with the added weight on their back. This is supposed to make the child stronger and more independent. In some places the mother, not wanting the child to run away too soon, will try to trip the child up, or at least make walking harder (Sofue, 1965: 155). Throwing *mochi*, pushing, making a lot of effort to make them fall because. “If you fall at the graveyard then that person will die young”<sup>75</sup>, the *mochi* is the symbol of the soul, crawling is

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<sup>73</sup> Calligraphy pen

<sup>74</sup> Abacus

<sup>75</sup> “墓場で転ぶと早死にする“ (Hakaba de korobu to hayajini suru)

the old day's soul, so in order to remove the old soul and get a new soul for standing and walking ... so it's an event for new soul (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 54). (PE20) decided to try it *Because the grandparents came we decided to do it properly*. Similarly *Grandfather brought the rice cake and then we wrapped it and tied it to their back. They managed to walk although they were wobbly* (PE13). Interestingly PE22 decided to perform this in lieu of performing the first shrine visit. *Did the rice cake at hatsumiyamairi just for fun and didn't observe any other rituals* (PE22). The dates as well seem slightly interchangeable: *We did it, it wasn't a fully-fledged rice cake, but it is mostly just for fun*. When did you do it? *When he was 100 days, or was it, perhaps it was on his 1<sup>st</sup> birthday* (PE24). Meanwhile (PE19) claims *The chikaramochi doesn't matter as much as kuizome or hatsumiyamairi, it has more to do with feeling. I think because it was fun to try*.

Interestingly again an element of the younger generation being keen on maintaining traditions. Although neither of them thought they had done it as children, the young couple (PE12) planned on performing the *chikara mochi* ritual when their child becomes 1.

## **7.7 Annual festivals**

Of more importance and relevance than a birthday, has always been the child's first festival, *Hatsu sekku*. Every March 3<sup>rd</sup> is *momo-no-sekku*, day of the girl's festival or dolls day and May 5<sup>th</sup> is *tango-no-sekku*, the boys festival or children's day. For a girl the first *tango-no-sekko* is celebrated by displaying the rows of imperial dolls *hina-ningyō*. Although varying in size, most families that have a girl will possess some kind of doll collection. Very often the girl will be presented with her first set of ceremonial dolls on her first festival, a collection that most often travels with them through life. Meanwhile, on the boys' first children's day, he will often receive a warrior doll, and a carp streamer, *koinobori*, will be hung outside the home (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 53).





Figure 36: Samurai warrior recieved on the first Tango-no-sekku



Figure 37: A mother photographs her 3 and 5 year old near meiji Shrine Tokyo



Figure 38: a 7 year old hangs up an *ema* at Meiji Shrine

Of equal importance are the 7-5-3 festivals, celebrated every November 15th at which time major shrines become a colourful sea of fancily clad children. As was discussed in Section 1.3.5, reaching seven years of age in Japanese culture was considered very important. Up until that age children did not receive proper funerary arrangements and were considered closer to the gods, due to return to their company were they to die prematurely (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 65). Consequently a ceremony was needed to celebrate the status reached. The celebrations differ between areas: in some all three ages are celebrated; in others it is girls aged 3 and 7 and boys aged 5, the perceived logic being that being more prone to pollution female children need more cleansing (Kuraishi, Komatsu & Miyata, 2000: 62). The Girls also put their hair up as bigger children would have been wont to do and the boy gets to wear hakkama.

Norbeck has also argued that there are also remnants of the birth pollution incurred, as well as various polluting agents or situations they might have come into in the meantime (Norbeck, 1953: 374).

It is also suggested that children were not recognized as members of human society until they reached this age (Omachi 1942, referenced in Norbeck, 1953: 374).

## **7.8 Chapter review**

It is of great interest to note recent trends wherein young women express having learnt of rituals from magazines and books rather than from their mothers or aunts. This will change the flora of traditions. Nevertheless, even though the rituals were coming from a written source, there seem immediately to have been adaptations. The generation gap, with younger women recently having become enthused by older traditions is visible upon watching YouTube videos with tags such as *Kuizome*, where very often the new mother is directing her mother or the mother-in-law as to how to behave and act.

Historically, ideas of pollution seem to have served to give the new mother a break from her duties within the home and thus must not be viewed merely from one standpoint. Once the child reaches its seventh year, that's when they head off to school, they learn to take on a different type of upbringing, many having to learn for the first time how to function fully in a group, having been lone children all their life. The mother's influence lessens, the demand for skinship lessens, consequently this is when many women head back onto the work market. The celebration of the child reaching their seventh year, becoming human, acknowledged members of society is also when the mother lets go: the child is no longer liminal, therefore by association neither is the mother.



## 8. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis an insight has been gleamed into the varying pregnancy traditions and rituals all the while contrasting the current with the historical. As a major transition, pregnancy affects every aspect of a woman's psychological, social and physical being, changing both her perception of herself as well as societies' perception of her. This has been observed throughout within the theoretical framework of a rite of passage. Viewing pregnancy and birth as a liminal phase provided a valuable framework for the data collected, the liminal status of the woman as expressed by traditions and rituals was explored, as she moved from mere womanhood to motherhood, as well as the liminality of the infant and young child.

### **Re-examining the framework presented at the start of the thesis:**

1) First step, that of separation, the process of slowly moving away from previously held position in society:

Immediately upon contemplating conception and pregnancy the woman starts moving towards the liminal. She examines liminal places such as magical pools, exotic fertility festivals, religious talismans and fertility clinics. She starts changing her diet, for instance eating healthier and eating pre pregnancy vitamins. Once she becomes pregnant she renounces a variety of foods as well as activities and the emphasis becomes on looking after the foetus.

2) Second step, marginality or liminality, when a person is no longer who they were once yet have yet to assume a new position in society:

Once the mother-to-be has wrapped the *haraobi* in her fifth month of pregnancy she has fully entered into the liminal period of her pregnancy. Already here the redefinition of the social self became discernible as the mothers to be enacted the role and costuming they felt they should fill and don so as to be mothers, expressed for instance through a change of wardrobe, hairstyle, mannerisms and activities. She is no longer a just a woman yet has ways to go before she becomes a mother.

3) The third step, the aggregation. Wherein the woman has now assumed a new societal role, this comes subsequent to a separation and the liminal process.

The aggregation, the reintegration, is slightly harder to pin point in the current thesis. The main aggregation is at approximately 30 days following birth when a woman who has returned to her parental home heads back to her husband at which point it is also customary to celebrate *hatsumiyamairi* (the first shrine visit). However as was drawn out in the societal chapter, the woman remains slightly liminal in as much as while her child is liminal, or until 6-7 years of age and children start school, most women remain in the home and do not go back to work.

### **Resurgence and continuity**

Yukiko Kobayashi, when discussing *satogaeri* (returning to the childhood home for birthing) expressed the apprehension that “Japan is rapidly becoming a society where the transmission of childrearing traditions and knowhow is in danger of being disrupted due to the disappearance of extended families and local communities; the main childrearing niches that have existed for thousands of years.” (Kobayashi, 2010: 29). This echoes the older ideas of seeking out dying remnants of folklore and protecting these items from changing. However, in 2003, Shintani et al, through a survey in a child rearing group circle, observed that young mothers were more diligent in practicing the various child related rituals and did so in higher numbers than women several generations earlier. They argued that magazine articles and child upbringing commodification were the cause for this resurgence (Shintani et al. 2003).

Discussions concerning the effects of the market on rituals often directly or indirectly imply that commercialization somehow contaminates and undermines the ‘authentic’ value or the essence of ritual occasions. The emergence of consumption, in particular conspicuous consumption, in the context of a ritual is often perceived by social commentators and critics as a threat.

As an example, the previously discussed (1.3.6.) modern resurgence of *mizuko kuyō* have

been argued against by Hardacre (1997) as well as Werblowsky (1991) for the perceived redundancy of such ceremonies as well as the money-grubbing priesthood. However during the interviews there was nothing but positive sentiment expressed towards the tradition, one of sadness but also for the need for such rituals so as to help the parents move on. There was also emphasis on the historicity of the rite. A 31 year old Tokyoite expressed the thought that *the baby memorial service is very necessary, I think it is needed to heal the mother and to heal the baby that died* (PE18). A 68 year old emphasised that the god himself was nice so the ritual had to be nice. *It doesn't matter if it's a Jizō sama for a newborn or not, it is still the guardian deity of children and it is always good* (PE23). *I think it's a very old culture, where you go to the temple and pray to Kannon and have a Buddhist service. I think it's necessary for the mother's feelings and that it's a good thing* said (PE25) then 70 years of age. And a 25 year old explained the continuity and the circumstances for future rituals, *I have three people close to me who have had a miscarriage and we have 3 mizuko jizō statues at home, two on the grave near my parent's house and one on the altar. I think it's a good thing. Every time we celebrate something at home we will have offerings for the infant. When there is a festival I will bring candy and dolls* (PE05). All these responses showed respect and appreciation for the rituals, in spite of the inherent advertising as well as the financial gain of the temples, which according to Hardacre, prey upon the emotionally weak following their unfruitful pregnancy. This indicates that although Hardacre may be right in as much as there is a unified seeming effort to introduce the ceremony for the unborn and that due to the nature of the sharing the customs become remarkably alike, the women still appreciated the festival, and thought it important to adhere to tradition.

Another example of the continuity element was that during the course of the interviews, I was lucky enough to interview 3 women, aged 85 (PE21), 68 (PE01) and 33 (PE27) who were directly related, giving me access to three generations of experiences and attitudes. In the context of the following I'll refer to them as the grandmother, the mother and the daughter. Understandably these readings are subjective.

The grandmother repeatedly expressed disdain for those who pondered the supernatural or practiced religion in connection with the pregnancy, as she so deftly put it “‘religious’ people go to shrines to pray for a child, but normal people don’t”. She had also not held on to her children’s umbilical stub, causing the mother to tell me that *It is important to place the umbilical stub in the Kiri no hako and look after it as it is important* (PE01). Then she expressed resentment at her own mother not having kept hers saying it ‘depended on the value the person put on it’. That it was important to her but not her mother. When I asked her if this was something she intended to give to her children she pondered and then came to the conclusion that it probably wouldn’t be important to her kids. Admittedly she didn’t recognize them as having any kind of talismanic properties, merely emotional value (PE01). The daughter again expressed her strong believe in the scientific angle, interestingly though with elements and overlays of traditional thought. She said she did not believe in *Yakudoshi* (calamitous year) but nevertheless decided to go to a shrine and get purified, just in case. She also expressed disdain for the post partum rituals. However, when I met up with her again 4 years later, she had just had a child the previous winter, and on her shelves there were photographs of the child’s first shrine visit, first dolls day and she told me she had performed both *Hatsumiyamairi* and *kuizome*, because she ‘felt it was the right thing to do’.

There are definite indications that there has been considerable resurgence in traditions and in particular rituals pertaining to pregnancy and the neonate. As PE05 phrased it *Quite a number of these traditions have gone out of vogue now but recently it’s also been reversed as young people want to uphold the traditions of the past. They feel the traditions were good and want to keep them alive. So when you search online you will find a lot of sites with old traditions aimed at young people.* These traditions are now however being shared largely in magazines, books on child rearing and then on websites which has lead to increased homogeneity between areas within Japan. The fact remains though that these rituals are perceived as a positive element, something to be celebrated.

As so often happens with folklore studies, the lack of literature available resulted in

consulting a wide array of schools of thought, from psychology, medicine, midwifery, anthropology and religious studies to name a few. These interdisciplinary sources often shed further light on the material contemplated, allowing for insights which otherwise would have been hard to get. Similarly the multi method approach, that is to say, interviews, questionnaire as well as participant observation were all tools which served the material well. In particular the interviews served very well in order to garner such information which was only drawn out after a relaxed exchange of information, and often in non chronological order, my own status as a mother repeatedly serving me well in gaining trust. That same boon, must be kept in mind, might have and quite possibly did presumably affect my choice of questions and may have coloured my perceptions and emphasis.

The limitations of the current research must not be overlooked. Although considerable data was collected, which granted a wealth of insights into current perceptions of rituals and pregnancy traditions, offering important empirical evidence, the sample was limited. There are definite data restrictions in as much as the participating women came largely from a. Tokyo or b. Akita thus the social-demographic results, although adequate for testing the waters, do not yield statistical data and can not necessarily be thought to be representative for the whole of Japan. Customs and traditions vary. Thus it is highly likely that a similar study conducted in southern Japan might have yielded slightly different emphasis, however the recent trend of the re-emergence of traditions as being fashionable and the ‘correct thing to do’ amongst younger generation I find likely would echo throughout. That being said, an analysis of a larger set, wherein statistical data could be obtained, would in all likelihood benefit from this thesis as a basis for which rituals and traditions there are out there.

The question arises whether the mothers’ liminal period lasts until a month following the birth of the child, once she’s been reintegrated ceremonially into the shrine, at which point she is highly unlikely to be returning to work, but more likely to return to the home see to the child and the home. Or conversely whether it is a gradual process. An example would be a term with very negative overtones, that of the *gyaru-mama*, *gyaru* normally applies to a



young woman/girl who tends to dress outrageously very often applying huge amounts of makeup so as to be almost unrecognizable. A *gyaru-mama* on the other hand is a woman used to belonging to this group on the fringe of society who deliberately does not change her habits, demeanour nor clothing upon becoming a mother. The truth is that the large majority of mothers to be, do acquiesce to these societal demands, incorporating them for the large part as their own wishes.

Symbolically the pregnant woman is faced with the nigh impossible task of presenting a calm, dignified, happy exterior while cleaning the bathroom. Few mothers have the opportunity to go back to work until the child reaches school age, at which point she only really has the option of applying for a part time position so as to be able to be there for the child. With very little assistance from the father the brunt of the upbringing lands squarely on her shoulders and society will judge her on the outcome of her child, his/her successes or failures. Thus the older perception of the child being holy is revebrated through modern customs.

The purpose of this study was to fill in very obvious gaps in the existent English language literature on pregnancy beliefs, traditions and rituals, making use of both very up to date data as well as historical folklore data.

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## Appendix

### Appendix I - Questionnaire English Language

#### *First page after choosing of language*

#### Beliefs Pertaining to Childbearing in Japanese Society.

You are being invited to participate in a Post graduate student research project. I would be most grateful if you could take the time to read the following information carefully. Please feel free to ask any questions you might have or if you would like more information.

Thank you for reading this.

Having children means a major change to one's life, and the pregnancy period, most would agree, is one of constant discovery and learning. Among the many things many have commented upon is all the advice, all the 'rules' and taboos they had not been aware of before, but suddenly seemed to appear from everywhere. These little snippets of cultural information is what this research seeks to bring forth.

There are a number of literary references to various customs and taboos pertaining to pregnancy, but nearly all document traditions from the distant past. In doing this research, I hope to discover what beliefs may have survived through the ages, as well as what new ones may have been born.

All information that you give during the answering of this questionnaire will of course be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports nor publications.

As the research will form the basis for my post graduate thesis there is the possibility that the information provided may be published in part or in full, but your identity will not be disclosed.

This project has been ethically approved under the School of East Asian Studies departmental Ethics Review Procedure.

#### Contact for further information:

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir  
202 Bloom Palace, Mure 3-10-22,  
Mitaka-shi, Tokyo-to  
181-0002 Japan  
e-mail: g.thorgeirsdottir@sheffield.ac.uk

Prof. James H. Grayson  
School of East Asian Studies  
University of Sheffield  
Sheffield S10 2TN  
United Kingdom  
email: j.h.grayson@sheffield.ac.uk

Your participation in this research is very much appreciated,



Thank you.

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir

*Begin Questionnaire button*

To begin with, I'd be grateful if you could give me some minor background information to be used to quantify the data collected. Again let me repeat that unless you wish it differently this questionnaire is absolutely anonymous!

Are you: Female ☐ Male ☐

How old are you: *drop down menu with years* starting at 18 -20, 20-25, 25-30, 30-35, 35-40, 40-45 and onwards up to 80 and higher

年 :

Are you a parent? Yes ☐ No ☐

If you are a parent, how many children do you have? *drop down menu with 1,2,3,4 and more than 4*

What is your level of education? *drop down menu with compulsory schooling, high school, Vocational school and University level*

Where were you born *drop down menu with countries*

City/village/place \_\_\_\_\_

Where do you live now? *drop down menu with kens*

City/village/place \_\_\_\_\_

What is your connection to Japan and or Japanese culture? \_\_\_\_\_

**When answering the questions please try to give examples, either from your own experience or from that of others.**

Should you think of something else that might be of interest please include it either with the question you are answering at any given time, or If you wish, you will also have an opportunity to leave comments at the end of the questionnaire.

All in all there are ten pages of questions.

Page one of ten Conception

1. Do you know of any ways to increase the likelihood of conception? Can the time of the month, being around certain people or eating certain foods in any way influence this likelihood?

2. Can being around children, in any way affect a woman? Are there any specific things she should avoid if she does not want to become pregnant? Have you ever heard of pregnancy being contagious?
3. Have you heard of ways in which one can influence the future sex of the child by eating specific foods. If so which foods and how does it work?
4. Is the purchasing of conception talisman (omamori) from a shrine or a temple practiced around you? If so who purchases it and what is the general feeling towards it? Is there a difference whether it comes from a shrine or a temple.

Page two of ten Pregnancy

5. Are there any specific foods that you believe or have heard others express belief in being necessary for a woman during the pregnancy?
6. Are there any foods or drinks you have heard of, that might be dangerous to the child or the mother during pregnancy? If so what foods are they and what effect do they have? As an example my mother told me that eating tongue would cause the child to be born mute
7. Can the mothers' mood during pregnancy in any way affect the unborn child, or does it perhaps say anything about the child's future character?
8. Are there any beliefs regarding morning sickness? Can it say something about the unborn child? Do you know of any ways to stem morning sickness?
9. Should the pregnant woman in any way change her role towards animals? Can pets affect the pregnancy?

Page three of ten

10. Is bathing in any way different for a woman when she is pregnant? Are there any things of which she must beware?
11. Is it of any importance if two women are pregnant in the same household at the same time? If so why and is anything done about it?
12. Is there anything a pregnant woman is not permitted to do? Any normal chores that might be harmful once she is with child?
13. Have you heard that if a woman doesn't do her chores properly, for instance cleaning the bathroom, it will affect the child? How does it affect the child and have you heard of any other such beliefs?

Page four of ten

14. Does the father show any signs of the pregnancy, for instance weight gain? Are you aware of any instances where the father has fallen ill during the pregnancy or labour?
15. Is there any way to tell the sex of the baby before birth, for instance by the shape of the belly? How she carries it? Have you heard of any other ways of divining the child's sex?
16. Have you ever heard of a child being marked physically by an experience the mother had whilst carrying? A birthmark for instance.
17. Have you ever been aware of any beliefs regarding the preparation of the home for the baby before birth? Is the washing of or receiving of baby clothing for instance, in any way taboo?

Page five of ten

18. Are there any beliefs regarding giving the child a name before birth? Is luck in any way involved?
19. Is the wrapping of the Haraobi being practiced by those around you? Are there any differences between people in how it is practiced? When and where does it take place? Has it changed?
20. Is it usual for an expectant mother to receive a talisman (omamori), if so who does she receive it from, when, and does it make a difference where it was bought?
21. Are there any other religious practices you can tell me about that take place during the pregnancy?

Page six of ten Birth

22. Are you aware of any ways in which to induce a long awaited birth? Do you know of any instances when they have been used?
23. Is there anything that could facilitate the birth? Perhaps foods, a specific person or an animal?
24. Does the time of the month, the phase of the moon or the time of the year in any way influence the birth? Are there any more births at a particular time than at others?
25. Are there any beliefs that the day on which the child is born will influence its character? Perhaps the weekday or whether it's born on a holiday?
26. Have you heard of people planning the pregnancy so that the birth would fall on a particular year, month or even day? Are there any years that are worse than others, if so why?

Page seven of ten

27. Have you heard of parents adjusting the child's birthday, for instance moving it forward a month? If so why and can you give an example?
28. Are you aware of any specific customs or beliefs surrounding the umbilical cord or the placenta (afterbirth)? Do you know how they are disposed of? Has that changed in past generations that you know of?
29. Who should be present at the birth? How has that changed in the last century?
30. Is there anything particular about the way in which the new born child is washed, by whom it is washed or how?
31. Does the child's first clothing or wrap hold any special meaning?

Page eight of ten Infancy

32. Are you aware of any customs regarding when the mother can bathe again after giving birth?
33. Are there any characteristics one can observe in a newborn that might indicate the character or the future of the child? Things like a high forehead, a dimple, whether it cries a lot?
34. Are there any customs regarding who visits with the mother and child after birth and when?
35. Are you aware of any customs regarding gift giving after the woman has given birth? What kind of presents are they? By whom are they given? And when?
36. When is it appropriate to name the child?

Page nine of ten

37. Are there any customs you are aware of regarding the naming of children? For instance names that run in families, dreams, stroke number, if so what meaning do they hold? If you have children yourself, how did you come by their names?
38. If a child is named after someone, does it make a difference whether that person is living or deceased?
39. If bringing the child to the shrine is still practiced, when does it take place, who attends and does the child's demeanour during the ceremony have any meaning? Can you describe what takes place during the ceremony?

40. Have you ever heard of a child being offered two or three things and what he or she chooses will determine it's character?
41. Do you know of any foods or drinks the mother should avoid or try to get whilst nursing?  
Do you know why?
- Page ten of ten
42. Do you know of any customs regarding the cutting of the child's hair and nails during those first months?
43. Is the child's umbilical cord(へそ) kept? If so, does it have any purpose later, for instance for medical tea?
44. Have you heard of a talisman (omamori) being sewn into the back of a child's kimono? Or of the child receiving patches of material from a healthy child's kimono to be sewn into a kimono.
45. Are there any other kinds of religious rites after the child is born, if so what kind of rites, when do they occur and who attends them?

The questionnaire officially ends here, if you however have given birth yourself and have the patience for two more questions on the birth giving experience, I would be most grateful.

### Birth experience questions page

These are open ended questions and as such if there is anything you want to add or mention feel free to do so.

What was most memorable about the birthing experience?

Was there anything you found uncomfortable about the whole experience, apart from the obvious pain?

### Last page

If you have thought of something else you would like to add or if you have comments or questions please include them here. Also, if you would be willing to answer follow up questions should any arise, please include your e-mail.

*Box for comments and or e-mails*

Thank you again for your time and patience.

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir

g.thorgeirsdottir@sheffield.ac.uk

## Appendix II - Questionnaire Japanese

### first page after choosing of language

日本社会での妊娠および出産に関する信仰について大学院研究生の調査プロジェクトご協力のお願いです。もしお時間を割いていただき、下記の資料を読んでいただければ大変ありがたく思います。

どうぞ、どのしつもんに関してもご自由にお答えください。  
そして他にも情報があればお教えください。

子供を授かることは、その人の人生において重大な意味を持ちます。そして妊娠期間中には、様々なあたらしい事を学んでいきます。

多くの事、多くの話の中には、助言や、妊娠が分かってから、突然どこからともなくいろんな人から、妊娠前には知らなかった規則や禁忌の話を聞いたと思います。これらの文化の情報の一部分がこの調査に光をもたらします。

文学の上では、妊娠に関する様々な習慣や禁忌が書かれていますが、ほとんどのものが、大昔の記録です。この調査から、新しく生み出された俗信のみならず、世代を超えて言い伝えられてきたものを発見できればと考えています。

この調査票の質問一回答については、全て無記名です。いかなる報告書・発表によって身元を明らかにすることとはありません。

この調査研究は、私の額論文として発表することになると思いますが、皆様の氏名については一切公表することはありません。

この研究課題は、私が在籍するシェフィールド大学、東アジア研究部門で道德上の有無を検討した上で、問題なしとの回答を得たものです。

もし質問あれば：

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir  
181-0002 東京都三鷹市牟礼 3-10-22  
ブルームハウス 202  
e-mail: g.thorgeirsdottir@sheffield.ac.uk

Prof. James H. Grayson  
School of East Asian Studies  
University of Sheffield  
Sheffield S10 2TN  
United Kingdom  
email: j.h.grayson@sheffield.ac.uk

本日は、貴重なお時間をいただきましてありがとうございました。

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir

グネラソルゲストッチル

### *Beginning of questionnaire*

先ず初めに、データの定量化を量るために、あなたに関する情報を頂けますでしょうか。このアンケート調査は無記名です。

性別： 男 ☐ 女 ☐

How old are you: *drop down menu with years* starting at 18 -20, 20-25, 25-30, 30-35, 35-40, 40-45 and onwards up to 80 and higher

年：

あなたは親ですか？ はい ☐ いいえ ☐

あなたが親の場合、子供は何人いますか？ *drop down menu with 一人, 二人, 三人, 四人, 四人以上*

あなたの最終学歴は何ですか？

*中学校卒業*

*高等学校卒業*

*専門学校卒業*

*大学卒業*

あなたの出生地： *drop down menu with kens*

市町村名： \_\_\_\_\_

現住所： \_\_\_\_\_

*This was obvious and centered!*

答えを書いて頂くときは、自分の経験や伝え聞いた事について、例を書いてください。

もし、何か自由に書きたい事があれば、ここかこの質問の最後に記入してください。

### *First page of questions* 受胎について

1. あなたは妊娠しやすい方法を何か知っていますか？決まった月とか、決まった食べ物を食べると妊娠しやすくなるのですか？

2. 子供達に囲まれると妊娠しやすくなると言われています。妊娠したくない女性が、それを避けるためにする具体的な事柄はありますか？今までに、この事で妊娠

した話を聞いた事がありますか？

3. 特別な食物を食べる事によって、子供の性別に作用する事があるのを聞いた事がありますか？もしあるとすれば、それは何の食べ物で、どのように作用すると聞きましたか？
4. 妊娠したい時に、神社でお守りを買う事がよくありますか、または買った事がある人が回りにいますか？もし買うとすれば、誰がお守りを買いますか？また、お寺のお守りと神社のお守りに違いはありますか？

#### Second page of questions 妊娠について

5. 妊娠中の女性が摂るべきと信じられている特別な食べ物などがありますか？
6. 妊娠中に、母親とおなかの子供のために食べてはいけない食べ物や飲み物がありますか？もしそうであれば、それはどんな食べ物ですか？例を挙げれば、母は私が妊娠中に舌のお肉 を食べると三口の子供が生まれてくると言いました。
7. 妊娠中の母親の態度(状態)が、まだ生まれていない子供や、またひょっとしたら生まれた後の子供の性格に影響を及ぼすと言われているのを知っていますか？
8. つわりに関して何か信じられていることがありますか？それは生まれてくる子供について何か言われますか？つわりを止める方法を知っていますか？
9. 妊娠中にペットがいることになにが影響はありますか？

#### Third page of questions

10. 妊娠した女性は、入浴する時に妊娠する以前と違ってすべき、入浴方法がありますか？また、もっとも注意すべき点は何ですか？
11. もし、同じ家の中で二人の女性が妊娠した場合、それは、何か重要なことですか？もしそうならば、何かすべきですか？
12. 妊婦がしてはいけない事がありますか？家事で妊婦とおなかの赤ちゃんに害を及ぼすようなことはどのような事ですか？
13. 女性が家事を手抜きしてはいけないと言う事を聞いた事がありますか？例えば、トイレを綺麗にしないと子供に影響するか、どのように影響するかなど、このような話を他にも聞いた事がありますか？

#### Fourth page of questions



14. 父親には妊娠のどのような兆候を知らせますか、例えば体重の増加など。妊娠中や分娩中に父親が病気になる事があるのを知っていますか？
15. 子供が生まれる前に、性別を知る方法がありますか？たとえば、検診の映像で性器の形が映ったりとか。どうやってそれを知りますか？生まれてくる子供の性別を予知する他の方法を聞いた事がありますか？
16. 母親が子供を身ごもっている間に身体の特徴(しるし)がこどもに受け継がれることを聞いた事がありますか？例えば、痣やほくろ。
17. 生まれてくる赤ちゃんのために、家庭で準備する事に関して信じられている事がありますか？ベビー服を洗ったり、受け取ったり。何かタブーはありますか？

#### Fifth page of questions

18. 生まれる前に子供に名前を考えることで、何か信じられている事がありますか？それは、子供の将来に関係していますか？
19. あなたの周りに「腹帯」の風習をした人はいますか？それをする事で、人々との意見の相違はありますか？いつ、どこでやりますか？この習慣は昔と比べて変わりましたか？
20. 安産のお守りをもらうのは普通ですか？そうであれば、誰から、いつ、どこで買ったかで違いはありますか？
21. 妊娠中に、どのような宗教上の儀式がありますか？その儀式はどのようなもので、内容はどうか。そして、それには誰が参列しますか？

#### Sixth page of questions 出産

22. あなた出産を誘引する(促進する)方法を知っていますか？あなたは、それを使った事のある人を知っていますか？
23. 出産を容易(促進)するためのものはありますか？それは、食べ物や人、動物ですか？
24. 出産に影響を及ぼす、時期(月)や時間帯はありますか？また、それ以外に特別な時期はありますか？
25. 赤ちゃんが生まれる日によって子供の性格に影響があると言われているの信じますか？ひょっとしたら、平日か休日の天気が出生のそれに影響していますか？

- 26.あなたは特定の年、あるいは月や日まで、出さんのひが当たるようにけいかくする人達がいるのを聞いたことがありますか？その時に悪い年がありますか？それはなぜですか？

#### Seventh page of questions

- 27.あなたは、両親が子供の誕生日は変えた話を聞いた事がありますか？そうであれば、なぜですか？
- 28.へそや胎盤に付いて何か明確風習（からわし）があるのを知っていますか？それをどのようにしよりするのか知っていますか？ また、これについて昔からかわっていることはありますか？
- 29.誰が出産に立ち会うべきですか？この100年でどう変わりましたか？
- 30.赤ちゃんが誕生した時の入浴は、どの様にして誰が洗ってあげるのか、何か特別な事がありますか？
- 31.初めての赤ちゃんに着せる(包む)ものには、何か特別な意味がありますか？

#### Eighth page of questions 幼年期

- 32.出産後、母親が再び入浴できる時、何か風習がありますか？
- 33.新生児によく見られる特徴で、こどもの将来の性格を特徴づけるものはありますか？額が広い、えくぼそして泣き虫かどうかなど。
- 34.出産後に、母親と子供が訪れる習慣は何かありますか？
- 35.出産後の女性に対して贈り物をする習慣について知っていますか？それはどのような種類の贈り物ですか？そして誰から誰宛に送りますか？
- 36.いつ子供にふさわしい名前をつけますか？

#### Ninth page of questions

37. 子供の名付けについて何か習慣はありますか？家族・夢・名前の画数、それらを含んだ意味を持って名前をつけますか？
38. もし、誰かによって名付けられたとしたら、それは今生きている人か亡くなっている人かどうかで違いがありますか？

39.初宮参りの風習はまたありますか、それはいつどのように誰が参加して行われますか？その間の子供のようす（泣く・ねているなど）にはなにか意味はありますか？また、初宮参りでは、どのような事が、執り行われますか？

40.あなたは、子供の性格が2～3の物で解かると言われるのを聞いた事がありますか？

41.あなたは授乳の期間に母親が避けた方が良い食べ物や飲み物を知っていますか？それは何故ですか？

#### Tenth page of questions

42.子供の散髪や爪切りについて初めての月の間に行う習慣を知っていますか？

43.子供のへその緒は、取って置かれますか？そうであれば、何か目的がありますか？それは、医療のためですか？

44.これまでに、子供の着物の裏にお守りが縫いこまれたり、健康な他の子供の着物の一部を、着物に縫いつけたりする話を聞いた事がありますか？

45. 子供が生まれた後に、どのような宗教上の儀式がありますか？その儀式はどのようなもので、内容はどうか。そして、それには誰が参列しますか？

質問は以上です。でも、もしあなたに子供がいたとして、あなたに残り二つの質問に答えてもらえるならば、とても幸いに思います。

#### Birth experience questions page

残り二つの質問に答え

or final page

自由に付け加えて頂いて結構ですが、何か付け加えておきたい事はありますか？  
出産に対して最も記憶にあるものは何ですか？

出産に対して、何か不快に思ったような事がありますか。もちろん、 出産の時の痛み以外で。

#### Final Page

何か付け加えたい事があつたり、なにか意見や質問がありましたら、お書きください。より詳細な内容を伺いたい際には連絡を差し上げて頂いても宜しいでしょうか？

もし差し支えなければメールアドレスをお書き添え下されば幸いです。

Box for comments and or e-mails

本日は、貴重なお時間をいただきましてありがとうございました。

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir

グネラソルゲストッチル

[g.thorgeirsdottir@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:g.thorgeirsdottir@sheffield.ac.uk)

# Appendix III - Glossary

<i>Anzan</i>	安産	Ease of birth
<i>Chikaramochi /isshō mocha</i>	力餅/一升餅	Strength rice cake
<i>Ema</i>	絵馬	Votive tablet
<i>Genki</i>	元気	Being energetic, positive
<i>Haraobi</i>	腹帯	Maternity sash
<i>Hatsumiyamairi</i>	初宮参り	First shrine visit
<i>Hatsutanjō</i>	初誕生	First birthday
<i>Heso</i>	へそ/臍	Umbilical cord
<i>Hiyasu</i>	冷やす	To cool down
<i>Inu no hi</i>	戌の日	Day of the dog
<i>Irojiro</i>	色白	Fair skinned
<i>Iwai</i>	祝い/祝	Celebration
<i>Jinja</i>	神社	Shrine
<i>Ojizō-sama</i>	お地蔵様	Stone statue of Jizō
<i>Kami</i>	神	Shinto god
<i>Kamisama</i>	神様	Honoured god
<i>Kampō</i>	漢方	Traditional healing system
<i>Kanji</i>	漢字	Chinese character
<i>Kannushi</i>	神主	Shinto Priest
<i>Kanreki</i>	還暦	Sixtieth birthday
<i>Kawayaka kami</i>	廁神	Toilet god
<i>Kegare</i>	穢れ.	Ritual pollution
<i>Kiribako</i>	桐箱	Paulownia wood box used for keeping the umbilical stub
<i>Kirinohako</i>	桐の箱	Box for the umbilical stub
<i>Kodakara</i>	子宝	Ease of conception
<i>Kosazukari</i>	子授かり	Ease of conception
<i>Kosodate</i>	子育て	Safe growing up
<i>Kotobuki</i>	寿	Longevity
<i>Koya</i>	小屋	Birthing or menstrual hut

<i>Kuizome</i>	食い初め	Weaning ceremony
<i>Kusuriburo</i>	薬風呂	Remedy
<i>Matsuri</i>	祭り/祭	Festival
<i>Meimei</i>	命名	Naming
<i>Miko</i>	巫女	Shrine maiden
<i>Mikoshi</i>	神輿	Festival float
<i>Minzokugaku</i>	民俗学	Folklore (the study of)
<i>Mizuko Jizo</i>	水子 地藏	Jizou statue for aborted fetuses
<i>Mizuko Kuyō</i>	水子供養	Funeral rites for lost pregnancies or aborted fetuses
<i>Nanayo, Shichiya, Oshichiya</i>	七夜	Seventh day ceremony
<i>Ninshin</i>	妊娠	Being pregnant
<i>o-bon</i>	お盆	Lantern Festival
<i>Obi iwai</i>	帯祝い/帯祝	Wrapping of the maternity sash ceremony
<i>Obi</i>	帯	Maternity sash
<i>Omamori</i>	お守り	Talisman
<i>Omikuji</i>	おみくじ	Paper fortune
<i>Omyamairi</i>	お宮参り	Shrine visit
<i>Onsen</i>	温泉	Hot spring
<i>Satogaeri</i>	里帰り	Returning home
<i>Setsubun</i>	節分	February 3 <sup>rd</sup> festival
<i>Shide</i>	紙垂	Paper streamer adorning Shinto areas of consecration
<i>Shimenawa</i>	注連縄	Shinto rope used to consecrate
<i>Taiban</i>	胎盤	Placenta
<i>Tera</i>	寺	Temple
<i>Torii</i>	鳥居	Shrine gates
<i>Totsuki tōka</i>	十月十日	Term for pregnancy, ten months and ten days
<i>Ubugi</i>	産着	Child's First clothing
<i>Ubume</i>	産女	Woman in late pregnancy
<i>Ubuya</i>	産屋	Birthing hut

<i>Ubuyu</i>	産湯	Infants first bath
<i>Yakubarai</i>	厄払い	Exorcism for yakudoshi, inauspicious year
<i>Yakudoshi</i>	厄年	Inauspicious year